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**Artists' Groups in Japan and the UK
and
their impact on the creative individual**

Hiroko Oshima

PhD

2010

**Artists' Groups in Japan and the UK
and
their impact on the creative individual**

Hiroko Oshima

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of
the University of Northumbria at Newcastle
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Research undertaken in
the School of Arts and Social Sciences

August 2010

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to give an alternative insight to the existing concept of individuality in visual art through an examination of the meaning of being individual for visual art practitioners, particularly for those who operate in an artists' group setting.

This research project is a critique of the seemingly unchallenged emphasis on the individuality and its strong association with creativity in the current British art schools. Cultivating individuality is one of the most important aims in both British and Japanese institutions where I have trained as an artist. Nevertheless, my group-oriented cultural background and my membership of an artists' group studying in an individually-oriented environment raise questions challenging the meaning of being an individual itself.

This thesis has no methodology set up at the beginning, which would usually be the case in a conventional academic thesis. Instead, the thesis develops thought experiments to examine what 'individual' means in order to arrive at methodology towards the end. Moreover, this piece of practice-led research is not about the contents of my practice but about the group feeling underlying my practice as an individual fine art practitioner. The investigation into the relational idea of the self of Zen, followed by Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics of the Universe of Three Categories, provide the research with a useful visual thinking tool: the triadic diagram. The investigation into the meaning of the individual develops further through an exploration of the concept of 'groupness'. Definitions of the term are carefully unfolded until the terminology allows us to contemplate different senses of the individual: singularity- and groupness- oriented individual.

As a result of the thought experiments examining different ideas of one's individuality, there emerge several action research practice-led methodologies for the fine art practitioner working in a group situation. One methodology brings groupness into my individual practice, and another introduces groupness situations to other practitioners. The contribution of this thesis is to provide a basis for fine art practitioners like myself to revalue their individuality in harmony with their group membership.

List of Contents

List of figures	4
Acknowledgements	5
Declaration.....	6
Chapter One - Introduction	7
1. 0. Individuals.....	7
1. 1. Individual art practice.....	8
1. 2. Individuality and art education	9
1. 3. Individual practitioner within a group	11
1. 4. Individuality in different cultures	13
1. 5. Incomplete view of the individual and my research question	15
1. 6. Towards a practice-led methodology.....	17
Chapter Two - Different notions of the self in the East and West	19
2. 0. Different notions of the self.....	19
2. 1. Analogy of the self: the rider and ridden.....	20
2. 2. Image of Western selfhood.....	23
2. 3. 0. Image of Eastern selfhood.....	25
2. 3. 1. Description of the <i>Ten Oxherding Pictures</i>	27
2. 3. 2. Dualism to oneness (Picture I - VII)	28
2. 3. 3. From one to three (Picture VIII - X).....	29
2. 4. 0. Three-fold self.....	34
2. 4. 1. Diagram I: Three-fold self	37
Chapter Three - Triadic relations and the individual	41
3. 0. Peircean triadic relations and Zen idea of the self.....	41
3. 1. Peircean theories.....	42
3. 2. Peircean triadic relations	47
3. 3. 0. Diagram II: Comparisons between Zen and Peirce.....	49

3. 3. 1. Further comparison.....	50
3. 3. 2. Improvement to the diagram	55
3. 4. Diagram III: Firstness as one's individuality	59
Chapter Four - Groupness and Individuality: towards a definition of groupness	63
4. 0. 0. Individual based on groupness	63
4. 0. 1. The Kyoto School: the starting point	64
4. 0. 2. Diagram IV	66
4. 1. Groupness	67
4. 2. 0. Individual-group relationship.....	70
4. 2. 1. Individual <i>and</i> Group.....	70
4. 2. 2. Individual <i>or</i> Group.....	73
4. 3. Different perceptions of the individual in the West and East	77
4. 4. 0. Recent global problem of the perception of the individual.....	82
4. 4. 1. Modernity: the shift towards individuality	83
4. 4. 2. Present and future ideas of individuality	87
4. 5. Diagram V: Singularity- and groupness- oriented individuals.....	91
Chapter Five: Individuality and group in fine art practice.....	95
5. 0. Artists' groups and their impact on the creative individual.....	95
5. 1. 0. Individuality in creative practice.....	97
5. 1. 1. Development of the concept of creativity	100
5. 1. 2. Modern development of the creative individual.....	101
5. 1. 3. Different perceptions of the creative individual	104
5. 2. 0. Artists' Groups and the individual practitioner	108
5. 2. 1. Different forms of artists' groups.....	109
5. 2. 2. Being a member of an artists' group	112
5. 2. 3. The Stuckists and Ryu Group.....	113
5. 3. 0. Diagram VI: The creative individual.....	116
5. 3. 1. Diagram VII: Singularity- and groupness- based individual practitioners....	120

Chapter Six: Practical engagements with individuality and groupness.....	123
6. 0. Practice-led methodology	123
6. 1. Action research.....	125
6. 2. 0. Individual practice and inquiry group	128
6. 2. 1. Research inquiry group	134
6. 3. 0. Groupness in practice.....	143
6. 3. 1. Curatorial project 1.....	144
6. 3. 2. Curatorial project 2.....	150
6. 3. 3. Teaching project: giving a group identity	155
6. 4. Conclusion to the thesis	160
 List of references	 162

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview: Paul Harvey by Hiroko Oshima	i
Appendix 2: <i>Members Only</i> exhibition.....	xiv
Appendix 3: <i>Japan to Northumbria</i> exhibition	xx

List of figures

Figure 1: <i>Napoleon Crossing the Alps at Grand-Saint-Bernard</i> (1800-1801) Jacques-Louis David.....	20
Figure 2: <i>Figure</i> (bronze figure of Lao Zi riding a water buffalo). (1675-1725) Unknown artist	20
Figure 3: Two-fold view of the self.....	25
Figure 4: Ten Oxherding Pictures.....	26
Figure 5: Pictures VIII to X.....	29
Figure 6: VIII- <i>The Ox and the Man both Gone Out of Sight</i>	31
Figure 7: IX- <i>Returning to the Origin, Back to the Source</i>	31
Figure 8: X- <i>Entering the City with Bliss-bestowing Hands</i>	32
Figure 9: Self as the inter-relationship between Pictures VIII, IX and X.....	38
Figure 10: Triadic relation of Peirce's three categories	50
Figure 11: 'The categories' by Floyd Merrell	56
Figure 12: Three-fold self in Zen 2	58
Figure 13: Peirce's three categories 2.....	59
Figure 14: The individual	61
Figure 15: The individual coming out of the larger whole	67
Figure 16: The world filled with individual things	72
Figure 17: Western idea of the individual-group relations	75
Figure 18: Japanese view of the individual.....	80
Figure 19: Singularity-based individual.....	93
Figure 20: Groupness-based individual.....	94
Figure 21: Author's identity as a fine art practitioner	118
Figure 22: Identity of a individual fine art practitioner	119
Figure 23: Singularity-based individual artist.....	121
Figure 24: Groupness-based individual artist.....	122
Figure 25: Studio practice.....	128
Figure 26: Studio desk.....	129
Figure 27: Notebooks	130
Figure 28: Sanding down the surface (photographed by Christina Kolaiti)	131
Figure 29: <i>Untitled</i> (2008).....	132
Figure 30: <i>Untitled</i> (2008).....	132
Figure 31: <i>Untitled</i> (2008).....	132
Figure 32: Working in the studio (photographed by Christina Kolaiti)	133
Figure 33: Paintings and the <i>Oxherding Pictures</i> shown together	135
Figure 34: First enquiry group session (photographed by Christina Kolaiti).....	137
Figure 35: Painting in progress (left) and Picture VIII from the <i>Ten Oxherding Pictures</i> (right)	138
Figure 36: Second session (photographed by Christina Kolaiti).....	140
Figure 37: Third session (photographed by Christina Kolaiti).....	142
Figure 38: <i>Members Only</i> exhibition at Bailiffgate Gallery, Alnwick	149
Figure 39: Invitation card (designed by Dan Wilde).....	150
Figure 40: Meeting with participants (photographed by Keith McIntyre)	152
Figure 41: <i>Japan to Northumbria</i> exhibition (photographed by Ikuko Tsuchiya and the author).....	154
Figure 42: Students discussing with John Lavell.....	157
Figure 43: <i>Nostalgia: the Road Home</i> : preparation and the opening	159

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my wholehearted gratitude, first of all, to my master Professor Toshihiro Hamano and all my colleagues in the Ryu Group for giving me this wonderful and priceless opportunity to study at Northumbria University, and for their constant and warm support and guidance throughout my study at the University.

I cannot be more thankful for their warm guidance and patience from my supervisory team, David Dye, Chris Dorsett, Sîan Bowen, and David Gray (who retired before completion of the research, yet has still kindly helped me). Their unique experience and knowledge have added different dimensions and depth to my thesis. Even with the complex and persistent language difficulties to do particularly with the writing of the thesis, their support has made the whole experience of doing a PhD research very worthwhile and fruitful.

I would like to thank those who participated in this research: Paul Harvey and his colleagues in the Stuckist group; the students who studied in the Overseas Foundation Diploma course in 2008/09, Annie and Kelvin; and the British and Japanese artists who agreed to join the Japan to Northumbria exhibition project, Tomoya Akamine, Junichi Amano, Sîan Bowen, Huw Dampney, Alice Feaver, Sachiyo Goda, Penny Grennan, Maiko Kobayashi, John Lavell, Shoji Matsumoto, Helen Smith, Ikuko Tsuchiya, Dan Wilde and Motomi Yasuda.

Also, my hard-working PhD colleagues (and our Programme Director Chris Dorsett) have to be mentioned here. We have shared both the joy and torment of doing a PhD in the developing and pioneering discipline of practice-led doctoral research. The very supportive and enthusiastic dynamics the group have developed over the past few years, has helped me get through difficult times, and what we have achieved together will remain valuable in the rest of my life.

Finally, my huge thanks and respects go to my parents for their understanding and truly loving support, throughout the period of my PhD research and all my life. I hope they are as glad as I am that I (and they) have managed to survive the long and hard period of fulfilment.

Hiroko Oshima, Newcastle, September 2010

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

Name: Hiroko Oshima

Signature:

Date:

Chapter One - Introduction

1. 0. Individuals

Like all rational people I consider myself as an individual person, and naturally, I imagine that other people will see this individuality since I see them in this way too. They are physically separated and different from me. When I say I am an individual I mean that I am a single and autonomous person distinct from any other, that is, from any other fellow human being.

Imagine that I am sitting in a room alone asking myself 'who am I?' Not surprisingly, I am stuck there in no time. Of course, my physical body is mine and cannot be shared with anybody else (except in the extreme case of donating an organ to somebody, when, as soon as it is taken out of my body, that part is no longer part of the whole). However, if the starting point is myself as a single person I cannot say a lot about me. I feel as though I am nothing without the signs and people surrounding me. However I want to be left alone even the room itself is made by someone. This feeling of helplessness is expressed in a passage in Soseki Natsume's¹ (1867-1916) novel *Kusamakura* (*The Three-Cornered World*).

You may think this world created by ordinary people a horrible place in which to live, but where else is there? Even if there is somewhere else to go, it can only be a 'non-human' realm, and who knows but that such a world may not be even more hateful than this? (Natsume, 1965: 12)

Although we would like to be as free as possible as an individual person, it is obvious that a completely single existence is not possible. Whether we like it or not we have to share this world with other people physically and

¹ Soseki Natsume (夏目漱石) is the prominent Japanese novelist in the Meiji era and a scholar of English literature. He studied in Britain between 1901-1903.

intellectually. This is not at all a new idea that the notion of the individual is relational. For instance, the Scottish psychiatrist Ronald David Laing (1927-1989) insists that the self exists because of the existence of others. It is an illusion that we think we are individual because of the individual body. Even if there is one body for one self, the body also is related to the environment (Laing, 1961). The importance of bringing this issue of being individual in the very beginning of this thesis is to contrast this general view on the individual with that of the individual artist. It seems that for people like artists being individual means a lot more than simply being alone. What does it mean to be an individual for an artist?

1. 1. Individual art practice

I have been studying visual art practice in the past decade in Japan and England. When I work in my studio painting, making sketches, taking notes about my ideas, or preparing my canvases, etc., I am conducting a visual art practice 'individually' both from my own and other people's points of view. As an individual practitioner, the production of artworks is my own. I make the action of producing the piece and I am responsible for the outcome whether it is positive or negative. Although I am not necessarily being secretive, my studio practice is very personal and it is just difficult to imagine sharing this experience with someone else. Living and practising in both Japan and the UK and studying visual art in two different art schools, the basic studio experience has been the same irrespective of the situation. This can be considered a rather solitary antisocial, and above all individually driven, experience.

However, needless to say, the source of the creative motivation is beyond the individual being of the practitioner. Anyone with a creative potential would understand that the creativity is inspired by other beings not just the

individual practitioner. Wendy Wheeler's statement on creativity supports this:

We might say that being creative, then consists, at least in part, of a rich, in some way well-nurtured, environment: a mind well-furnished with both experience and ideas – and this means richness provided by others: parents, teachers, friends, books and so on – and also a state of prepared receptivity. (Wheeler, 2006: 146)

In other words, the individual artist's creative talent or their artwork, on its own, is inert and does nothing. It is only the particular context and process of the whole society and culture that the artist or artwork is able to re-write and evolve itself in ever more complex forms. This is not difficult to understand. However, the view on individuality in the current art education seems to be suggesting the contrary, at least on the surface.

1. 2. Individuality and art education

From my personal experience of being trained as a practitioner in a British institution and my reading of course documents, the discovery and nurturing of each student's originality and creativity is the most important criterion in this country's art schools. I would demonstrate this claim by pointing to the description of a distinctive mark in Fine Art courses. This always involves notions of independence. For instance, the level six module guide for 'Studio Outcomes & Synthesis' for the BA (Hons) Fine Art programme, in the Visual Art Division at Northumbria University, states that students are expected to be able to develop 'a visual language to express [their] individual imaginative and conceptual ideas' and to distinguish their own 'methodology for their individual aptitude and interests'.² Although it is not generally discussed by artists, except in

² 'Studio Outcomes & Synthesis' are two year long undergraduate fine art modules, delivered by the Department of Arts, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Northumbria

relation to art school assessments, the implication is that the most valued assets in visual art in the professional development of artists are those of the individual. It is expected of an art student that they develop independence. This seems to be a commonly accepted view held by artists both about themselves and about the preceding generations who influenced our present practices and about the forthcoming generations who, as students and young researchers, have yet to make a mark on the way we produce art.

Similar views can be also found amongst those who write about art. The historian John Jefferies Martin defines the artist as a 'world-creating individual' who operates as an 'autonomous agent or wilful protagonist' (Martin, 2004: 6). Martin's words are immediately familiar to anyone who has spent time in a British art school. Terms such as 'autonomous', 'self-contained' and 'psychologically complex' (*ibid.*) evoke the romantic image of the path-breaking pioneer who has a unique, sometimes unacceptable, approach to life. The implication here is that art practitioners are not part of the society in which they operate. It is as if what happens in the creative realm takes place independently from what happens in society. Martin seems to see the artist as the quintessence of individuality. This notion fits in with the recent trend where we see artists acquiring a celebrity status. The most obvious case is in the rise of the Young British Artists (YBAs)³, including Damien Hirst and Tracy Emin, in the 90's. Such a movement seems to represent a situation where artists' individuality is celebrated.

University In the academic year of 2009/10 the module tutors were Sue Spark and Helen Baker.

³ 'Young British Artists or YBAs [...] is the name given to a group of conceptual artists, painters, sculptors and installation artists based in the United Kingdom, most (though not all) of whom attended Goldsmiths College in London. The term Young British Artists is derived from shows of that name staged at the Saatchi Gallery from 1992 onwards, which brought the artists to fame. It has become a historic term, as most of the YBAs are now in their forties. They are noted for "shock tactics", use of throwaway materials and wild-living, and are (or were) associated with the Hoxton area of East London. They achieved considerable media coverage and dominated British art during the 1990s.' (Wikipedia, 2009)

These artists have attracted huge attention worldwide. (Sakurai, 2004) This kind of movement seems to help accelerate the perception of fine art practitioners as celebrated (and, possibly, extraordinary) individuals, as well as their practice being individually oriented. This phenomenon of celebrity is connected with very large prices for individual works of art but this factor is not connected to the general aim of my thesis and, therefore, can be left unexamined here.

1. 3. Individual practitioner within a group

The key aspect of my practice in relation to these matters is my membership of an artists' group. In 1971 the artist Professor Toshihiro Hamano founded the Ryu Art Group in Japan. Being a very keen educator as well as an internationally renowned artist, his objective was and has been the nurturing of young local talent who went to study in art schools in big cities like Tokyo or Osaka. He also has been enthusiastic to send his students to art schools in different countries. Since 1995 the Group has had its European base at Northumbria University, the institution in which my research project has been undertaken. The Group has a very strong educational aspect where the more senior members look after the younger members and the younger ones learn from the seniors. In other words, the Group operates rather like a big family where the wisdom is handed down from one generation to the other.

I joined the Group in 1994 at the same time as I started my study in Tama Art University in Tokyo, and I have been a member since then. Through an agreement between the Group and Northumbria University, the younger Ryu artists study art within the Division of Visual Art and I was able to take advantage of this educational scheme to undertake a British master's degree and then register for a PhD. In Northumbria University where some

of the Ryu students study Fine Art, my role is to look after the young students.

What does it mean to me to be part of the Group in relation to my individual practice as an individual, particularly in a British art school? The Ryu Group is a collection of artists, all students of Professor Toshihiro Hamano, whose style of work and practice as an individual is very different. We do not work in collaboration in the sense of 'collaborative art' in which a group of artists produce artworks together. The Group work together in organizing cultural events and exhibitions in Japan and abroad. The Group's international cultural exchange activities are based at Northumbria University, including preparation of exhibitions and development of educational programmes.

I feel as though the whole experience of the involvement with the Group's international activities is an apprenticeship. Although it is not always easy and successful, the role is a very important part of my practice. My identity as an artist is profoundly based on the membership, although, it will most likely be difficult for the viewer to see an immediate influence of the Group membership from my paintings.

It looks as though my own practice as a painter, by the look of the produced work and how I produce them in my studio, is independent from my role in the Group, but my membership is very important for me as an artist. However, being a member of the Ryu Group has been a struggle for me at Northumbria University. When I say I have struggled, the struggle is not with the group membership but the perception of the membership by other people. On a personal level, through everyday conversations with art tutors I have been feeling as though my membership to the Group is considered something opposing my individual creative practice.

On a group level, a conversation with a member of the staff where we discussed our Group's presence and its activities, particularly the number of Ryu members studying at Northumbria, opened up very fascinating questions about my group identity. What this conversation seems to suggest was that people like this member of staff (in an institution like Northumbria) would think that the Group exists because the Group is active in terms of events and the Group's presence is not there if the members are students: the students belong to the bigger institution (another form of group). So there is a hierarchy of groups which needs to be clarified. This implies that the structure of the hierarchy needs to be understood by the people involved. The Ryu Group's presence at Northumbria is non-existent, or it is not strong enough. Should one artist be enough to represent the group existence? There are other members' presences somewhere else (i.e. in Japan in the Ryu Group's case). There are still many artists calling themselves 'impressionist', although the impressionist movement is not there any more.

1. 4. Individuality in different cultures

Anyone moving from one culture to another will experience disorientation caused by the cultural differences. Although this is a usual (and often stimulating) aspect of both international travel and the opportunity to study abroad, it seems important to take advantage of the process of experiencing a different culture and learning from it in order to undertake some research. As I completed my master's course in Fine Art I realized that my practices as an artist were different from the UK students in a profound way. I did not conform to the ideas about individuality described above. I was not just experiencing a rich field of cultural variation, the kind of experience that makes tourism such an exciting prospect, I was encountering a disparity in my status as an artist. What made my practice seem so peculiar and atypical in the UK – and possibly in Japan as well –

was that I had been part of an artist's group for over a decade, in fact, for most of my life, and this group was where my whole identity as a creative person was situated. I am a practitioner who operates within a group. As both a student and a fully trained practitioner of art I understand what I do within the framework of the Ryu identity.

As explained above, my membership with the Ryu Group's influence on my individual practice has been huge. However, moving between two cultures has made me think that my individuality is always being tested in the different situations. It is commonly accepted that the West, particularly its modern societies, are highly individualistic (Macfarlane, 1978; Martin, 2004; Wheeler, 2006), whilst many have noted that the Japanese do not have individuality (Doi, 1973; Nitschke, 1993; Macfarlane, 2007). The three scholars on the Japanese idea of the individual listed above claim that the concept of individuality was imported and learnt by the country from the West not long ago, therefore, it is not indigenous to the Japanese culture and its language. However, do the Japanese really not have the sense of being individual? The term individual is used at large in our present society in Japan. As an artist from the 'non-individualistic' society studying 'individually oriented' art in an 'individualistic' society, I cannot ask but if to be an artist and to be a strong and autonomous individual has to coincide, is a Japanese artist less significant than their Western counterpart? Is it used in the same sense in the two different situations, if the above view is correct? When one does not have the same background in which the concept of individual has been developed, the meaning of the concept may probably change. My hypothesis, arrived from my experience of being a member of a group and my background of non-individualistic culture, is that it may be possible to talk about different senses of individual.

1. 5. Incomplete view of the individual and my research question

The difficulties described above about the situations around my sense of individuality is the basis of my research. My perception of myself is that 1) I am an individual, 2) I am an individual from group-oriented Japan, living and studying in individualistic Britain, and 3) I am an individual fine art practitioner but also a member of an artists' group. All the personal experience mentioned above has made me question whether I am talking about the same thing when I say I am an individual in those contexts. My hypothesis is that being an individual seems to be a very fundamental aspect of our everyday life, but it is not right to assume we are always referring to the same thing. This led me to sense different kinds of individuality.

This thesis develops through a lot of consideration and thought experiments about the relations between individual and group, contrasting individuality based on singular self with individuality based on group. Nonetheless, when I use the term group, it does not imply particular groups or act of grouping. In order to express the difference, I have come up with a notion of groupness, which describes the feeling of belonging, a concept which I would like to develop in this thesis.

It is not my intention to be against being the individual both as a person and a fine art practitioner; it is quite the contrary. I would like to be an individual and independent practitioner myself in a sense of owning my own practice. I have to have practice⁴, that is my paintings, to be a fine art practitioner and this job cannot be done by other practitioners. However, I cannot stop feeling, my individuality and individual practice are not quite enough to talk about my practice and identity as a person. Therefore,

⁴ It is true that there are artists or practitioners who do not make all their own works. For example, the British sculptor Anthony Gormley is known to have assistants making the sculptures for him. However, I assume that they have a 'practice' even if not in the conventional way of the artist working alone in their studio.

when I came across Wendy Wheeler's book, *The Whole Creature*, in which she argues that the modern view on the individual is so 'incomplete', I realised that I was struggling with the 'incomplete' feeling. Wheeler explains the issue as follows:

Indeed, it is the entire argument of this book that Liberalism's over emphasis upon individualism, and upon a certain idea of human reason and knowledge, is mistaken. Not only is our understanding of human behaviour and reasoning incomplete when we fail to take account of the role of the body, emotion and tacit knowledge, but it is also incomplete, as suggested above, when we view people primarily simply as individuals. It is the whole creature (mind-body-environment) and the whole system (minds-bodies-cultural-and-natural-environments) which must be taken into account by anyone interested in human flourishing and creative living. (Wheeler, 2006: 33)

It may be possible to say that my feeling of not fitting was about the incomplete view of the individual. I hope that this thesis can offer an art practitioner's attempt to respond to Wheeler's idea. I realize it will be a huge task for me to go into the issues of human self, nature of individual and group, which requires this thesis to cover the vast areas of study in philosophy, religions, psychology and social sciences. Those human issues may well need a thesis of their own. I will be referring to a lot of different sources and some concepts developed by sociologists and psychologists. Nevertheless, this, I have to emphasize, will not aim to be a sociological – or indeed a psychological – thesis. The reflections contained in this writing are personal, but not private. If the common understanding of us being individual in the West is 'incomplete', the group-minded and conformist society like Japan, where the individual person does not know what to do, seems to me equally incomplete. It is one of my main concerns in this thesis to reach a common ground between those incomplete views of the individual.

1. 6. Towards a practice-led methodology

Finally, it is necessary to talk about the structure of the thesis. The first and foremost aim of this thesis is to provide practising artists, particularly those who are part of artists' groups, with an alternative understanding of what it means to be an individual practitioner. Although this is a practice-led piece of research, it has to be said that the purpose of this thesis is not to make a critical analysis of the actual outcome of my practice, i.e. my artworks. It is my intention to focus this thesis not on the content of these artworks (the 'what'), but on the process of being a fine art practitioner (the 'how'). Furthermore, my thesis does not follow the way in which a more conventional PhD thesis is written. In contrast to the usual approach to thesis writing, in which a research methodology is clearly stated in the initial part, I have discussed my individual and group perspectives first and then placed a methodology for understanding the tension between artistic individualism and artists' groups in the thesis conclusion. As a fine art practitioner, my usual working method is to establish interesting questions first and gradually, as I proceed, let relevant methods emerge. In this sense, my thesis follows the model I am most familiar with as an artist.

In the first half of the thesis (from Chapter Two to Five) I give a great deal of attention to theoretical investigations into the concepts of the individual and the group. I use visual materials, particularly diagrams drawn by myself, to elaborate and explain my thinking. Once again, this approach reflects my training in the visual arts but also supports the difficulties of writing a doctoral thesis in a second language. The development of the diagrams is an intrinsic part of the development of my argument: the diagrams and the text complement each other.

In Chapter Two I explore a visual experiment using analogies of the rider and ridden as representation of the self. The references are derived from philosophical traditions of the West and East. The argument develops a view in which the individual is seen as relational phenomena rather than a

single self. I provide diagrams of this relationship, which provides the basis of my visual thought experiments in the subsequent Chapters.

In Chapter Three I further the visual investigation by bringing in a different Western view provided by the American philosopher and inventor of semiotics Charles Sanders Peirce, particularly his theory of the three categories of the Universe. I offer a triadic diagram, based on these three categories, which describes the individual human state.

Chapter Four is dedicated to finding definitions for a new term 'groupness' which I have derived from the Kyoto School of philosophy which argues that one's self or individuality springs out of the larger whole. In order to do so, I will briefly go through the historical and socio-cultural theories of the individual-group relationship from both the West and Japan. My assumption is that this investigation will lead to the point where groupness can help me discuss different kinds of individuality.

In Chapter Five, based on the debate in the previous Chapter, I move to a discussion of the individual-group relationship in fine art practice and artists' groups. How can an individually oriented activity like fine art practice be related to group? What is the role of the artists' group for the individual practitioner?

Finally, Chapter Six is a practical response to the investigation. Here I describe a form of action research methodology based on the first-person experience which allows me to discuss the practice-led dimension of my study of artistic individuality and artists' groups. In this concluding chapter I connect the theories on the individual and the group with my practices as an individual practitioner and a member of an artists' group.

Chapter Two - Different notions of the self in the East and West

2. 0. Different notions of the self

We are about to start our journey to explore what being an individual is like, particularly for a fine art practitioner and very importantly for a practitioner working in a group situation. However, let us forget about the practitioner or the group for now. Before we begin the journey, I would like to invite the reader to an interesting visual introduction into very different conceptions of selfhood in the East and West. Why is self not the individual? The consideration of one's selfhood requires the consciousness of a single or individual person. Indeed, the question of what makes a person or an individual has and will still fascinate and trouble us human beings for many years. Numbers of thinkers and scholars, starting from Aristotle (Williams, 1961 and Wheeler, 2006), and so many areas of study (from philosophy, psychology to religions, from anthropology to social sciences and politics) have debated this issue. A clearly agreed idea of self has been altogether unattainable, and no one seems to have come to commonly and universally understood conclusions, although the existence of the self as such is a self-evident fact for everyone. However, the difficulties themselves are the core of the investigation in this thesis.

In the following sections we will investigate into the different notions of the self in the East and West using emblematic analogies of the rider and ridden from both Western and Eastern philosophy and tradition. The emblematic analogies were key to my investigation during my MA study at Northumbria University. I have looked at different notions concerned with this matter from both the East and West: Zen Buddhism, the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, and analytical psychology, Sigmund Freud's ideas in particular, along with the interpretation of some significant images of

riders and animals. Briefly stated, what the imagery reveals before us is firstly, it might be said that the self should be observed as an ever-changing flow like a river. Both Jung, another analytical psychologist, and Zen's ideas tell us that dynamism, movement or change is the essence of self: the self is by no means a concrete core or centre of things. Secondly, just because of its dynamism, *this very moment* of one's being is considered to be important and irreplaceable.

Some may argue that my investigation is not thorough enough to understand the spiritual and psychological life of a person, but at least, I hope, the following visual discussion of different notions of the self will give us some interesting foundation for our further argument on what is individuality.

2. 1. Analogy of the self: the rider and ridden



Figure 1: *Napoleon Crossing the Alps at Grand-Saint-Bernard* (1800-1801)
Jacques-Louis David



Figure 2: *Figure* (bronze figure of Lao Zi riding a water buffalo). (1675-1725)
Unknown artist

The different notion of one's selfhood in the East and West was the main focus of my MA Fine Art research where I tried to explain the difference using an emblematic analogy of the rider and ridden. I found two very contrasting traditions of such analogies from the East and West. The West has an ancient artistic tradition of showing the power and command of rulers, generals, etc., portraying them on horseback, with the horse depicted in a state of barely-controlled excitement, submitting to its noble rider, as we can see in a famous Neo-Classical painting, *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* (Figure 1) by Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825), in which Napoleon is magnificently riding on the back of his rearing horse. This tradition reaches as far back as the second century equestrian statue of Emperor Marcus Aurelius on the Capitol in Rome. The theme, a great ruler on the back of his unruly horse, appears to reflect an image of a strong self which can control and even conquer the uncontrollable world. This image is a recurring theme for many traditional sculptures and paintings in the West. There is no tradition like this in the East. The rider and ridden relationship is illustrated rather differently as can be seen in an image of a monk on the back of an ox seen in a Chinese bronze sculpture of Lao Zi (6th century BC, 老子 in Chinese) (Figure 2), the founder of Taoism⁵. The great thinker is depicted riding an ox in a rather peculiar way: he is seated sideways on, seeming to make no effort whatsoever to control the ox. We see a very striking contrast between those Western and Eastern images of the rider and ridden. In the former, the power relationship between them is apparent, whilst in the latter who is controlling whom does not seem to be a significant matter.

The particular images used here are not initially meant to represent one's selfhood. However, they provide a kind of contrast: we find different notions of the self in the two different cultures. Examples of such complementary images can be found in the philosophies and social and

⁵ Taoism has close association with Zen in terms of its concern with 'nothingness'.

cultural theories of both cultural spheres. In my MA dissertation, as the demonstration of Western use of imagery to portray one's selfhood, I examined the images of horse and rider used by Sigmund Freud as a metaphor of conflict between bodily instinct and reason in which Reason always overpowers the Instinct⁶. I also referred to the Nineteenth Century German Philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) who applied the image of the *Idea* (reason) riding the *Will* as an explanatory device in his metaphysics. Here, the *Idea* seems to have control but in fact it is the *Will* that carries the intellect to wherever it desires. (Yanagida, 1992) My Eastern model was the well-known Zen imagery the *Ten Oxherding Pictures*, which illustrates the process of one's spiritual life, the ten stages of a man (ox-herd) trying to attain liberation of the Self: i.e. enlightenment (*satori* in Japanese) or an 'awakening of a new consciousness' as Daisetz Suzuki (1964) puts it. The details of the pictures will be discussed later.

It is not my intention to go into great detail about the sourced ideas and theories here, because the purpose of this section is to provide a ground for understanding different imageries communicating the same human phenomenon: the self. It is to be hoped that these visual materials will help us grasp exactly what sort of differences we are seeking by saying different notions of selfhood, and prepare ourselves for our later investigation into the Western and Eastern perceptions of being individual. Let us move on to the details of the images.

⁶ 'Freud had collected antiquities since the late 1890s and the well-known Viennese archaeologists Emanuel Loewy and Ludwig Pollak were among his friends and advisors. Freud's passion for collecting emerged during the years in which he was elaborating the first elements of psychoanalysis. This historical combination was to leave metaphorical traces in his work.' (*Sigmund Freud online*, no date)

2. 2. Image of Western selfhood

In this section I would like to discuss the modern Western notions of the self developed by Schopenhauer (19th century) and Analytical Psychology (20th century) and their use of the images of the rider and ridden as the representation of selfhood in more detail.

Let us start with Schopenhauer's view on the self. He refers to individuality, the character of man in a quite large part of Book III; because the idea of *Will*, by which every single entity is equally and inevitably influenced, is a universal force and it does not prove the fact we each have personality. He asserts that the individual, a person, is not will as a thing-in-itself, but is a phenomenon (or reflection) of *Will*, and is therefore already determined as such, and has therefore come under the form of sufficient reason, a fact which he claims has been overlooked. The following is a quotation from Book II:

Motives do not determine the character, that is, his actions, the outward fashion of his life, not its inner meaning and content... For a man, individuality makes itself powerfully felt. Every one has a character of his own; and therefore the same motive has not the same influence over all, and a thousand circumstances which exist in the wide sphere of the knowledge of the individual, but are known to others, modify its effect. (Schopenhauer, 1896: 180)

Schopenhauer's investigation into the *Will* is remarkable, in terms of his notion of inner meaning and content, not only of this visible world: *Idea*. He compares the will to a blind, but physically powerful man, who carries on his shoulder a sighted man, a metaphor of reason, whose legs are paralysed. This sounds as though the sighted man, the rationality or the intelligence of human beings, is controlling the blind man, the will to live or instinct. However, it might be more appropriate to say that the will is actually carrying the rationality in the direction it wants to go. (Toyama, 1986)

Moving on to Psychoanalysis, Freud's explanation of the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious, the *ego* and the *id* in Freudian terms, was mentioned in the introduction. He compares the relationship to that of the rider and his horse. The ego, *i.e.* the rider is, in a word, reason and good sense, while the id, *i.e.* the horse, represents the untamed passions. "The horse supplies the locomotive energy, while the rider has the privilege of deciding on the goal and of guiding the powerful animal's movement." (Freud, 1973) Here we can see its connection to Schopenhauer's metaphor of the blind man and the sighted man. This assumption might not be wrong, because both Freud's (and Jung's) references to Schopenhauer's writings are seen in many of their works. Also, Freud's image of horse and rider is apparently influenced by the western traditional artistic images of horse and rider, as was seen above. Both Freud's and Schopenhauer's images tell us that human beings cannot exist without the two sides of their being: power, energy, instinct on the one hand, reason on the other. For Freud this is the unconscious and the conscious; for Schopenhauer, the Will and the Idea.

Before proceeding to the Eastern example, let us focus our attention on the two-fold relationship between the rider and ridden. Essentially, although their area of study and terms they use are different, Schopenhauer and Freud's models of the rider and ridden (for Freud this is the unconscious and the conscious; for Schopenhauer, the Will and the Idea) seem to reveal to us that the human psyche consists of two sides: power, energy, instinct on the one hand, reason on the other, and both are absolutely necessary. The two sides are constantly in conflict as to which controls what (Figure 3).

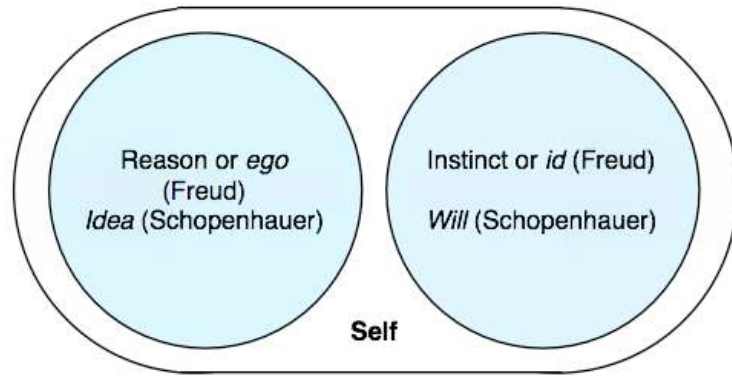


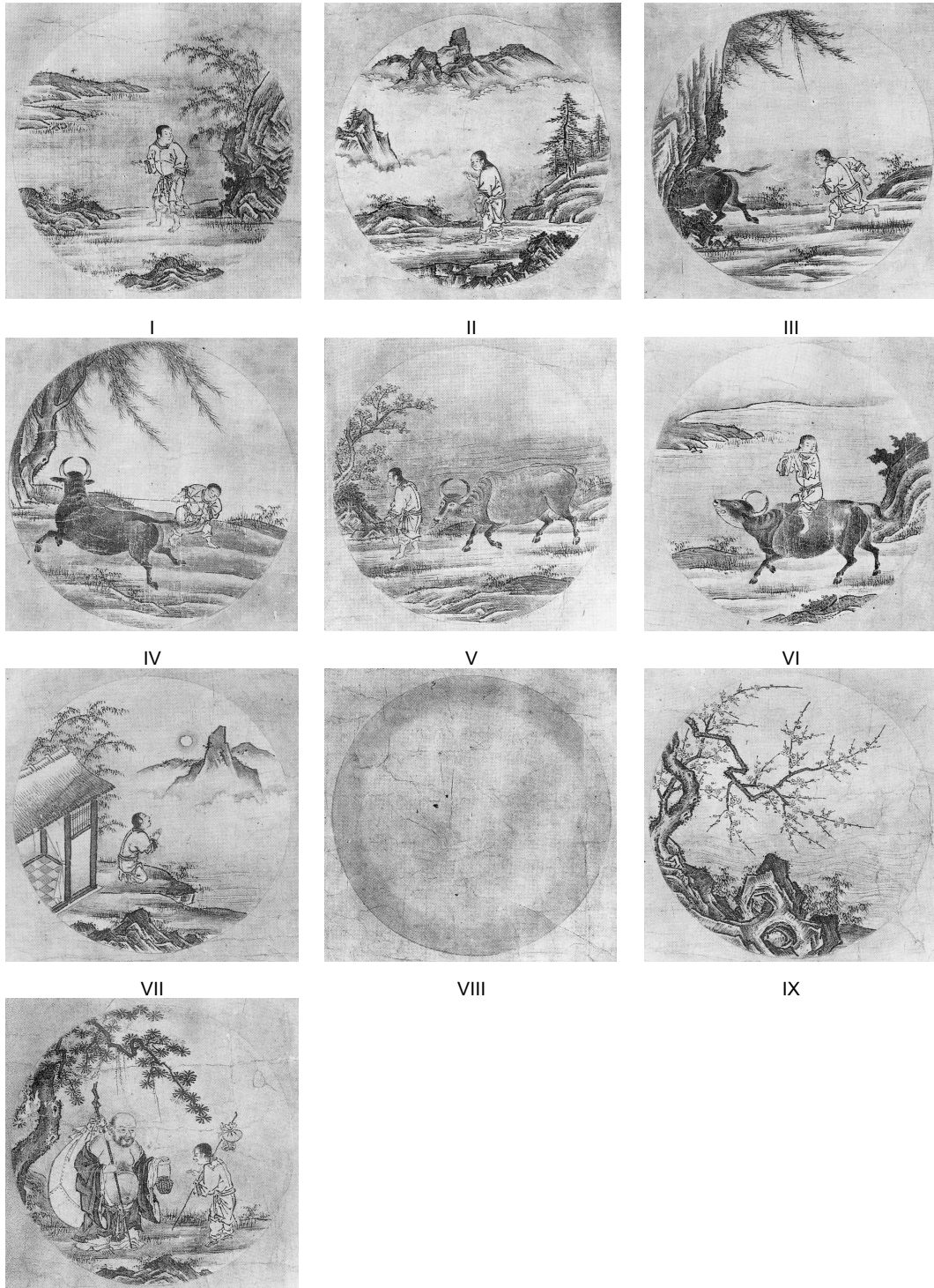
Figure 3: Two-fold view of the self

2. 3. 0. Image of Eastern selfhood

The visual analogy I would like to introduce here for our argument on Eastern selfhood is the *Ten Oxherding Pictures* (Figure 4). Zen dismisses any theorization, so we rarely see text attributed to Zen Buddhist teaching. More than one version of the *Ten Oxherding Pictures* were produced in China and Japan.⁷ The series of ten pictures was originally created by a Zen master of the Sung dynasty (the 12th century) known as Kaku-an (郭庵) alongside poems and introductory remarks attached to them. The version used in this thesis is the famous Japanese version attributed to Shu-bun (周文, first-half of the 15th century), the well-known Zen Buddhist artist-monk at Shokoku-ji in Kyoto. The *Ten Oxherding Pictures*, as a guide or a textbook, illustrate the process of one's spiritual life, and 'are explainable as illustrating the stages of the psychological process in which the Zen student goes through' (Suzuki, 1964: 202) in his training to attain enlightenment. The animal ox, ushi (牛) in Japanese, is compared to the 'mind or heart or the Self' (*ibid.*: 198). As the title shows, this is a set of ten pictures which tells a story of a man and his relationship with an ox, a metaphor of his 'true self' (Ueda, 1992), which he thinks he has lost. This

⁷ According to Suzuki (1964), Kaku-an was not the first one who made use of the imagery of the ox to explain Zen training in stages. There are some indications that more than one person used the ox to visualize the steps in the training of Zen but those are now lost.

series of illustrations shows the process of a Zen trainee achieving *satori*, enlightenment, or, in Suzuki's term, the awakening of a new consciousness (Suzuki, 1964).



X
Figure 4: Ten Oxherding Pictures

2. 3. 1. Description of the *Ten Oxherding Pictures*

First, we would like to find out what each picture tells us. I shall follow the explanation by Daisetz Suzuki (1870-1966), the authority of the study of Far Eastern philosophy⁸. Picture I shows the starting point of his journey; he notices his loss of his self, the ox, and begins searching for it; he questions himself: what am I? (Ueda, 1992) 'The remarks with Picture I occur with my view of the original home which we have never left, but which, owing to our intellectual delusions, we are led to imagine has disappeared from our sight.' In this stage, he is obsessed by 'desire for gains and fear of loss' and 'ideas of right and wrong spring up like a phalanx' in him. However, 'searching for the lost is a great initial error we all commit'. In Picture II, he finds traces of the ox. What this means is that 'by inquiring into the doctrines, he has come to understand something', although it is not yet clear enough. In Picture III, we can see that he eventually has found the ox. 'It is the finding of the precious animal which is not other than himself'. The whole universe is himself. He has not noticed the fact yet. Picture IV, V, indicates that the man is trying to master the ox. In Picture IV the ox-herd is connected to the ox with a piece of rope. Japanese philosopher Shizuteru Ueda points out that the tension between the two shows that the unity between the two still can be broken easily (Ueda, 1992: 41). The tension eases up as the training furthers (Picture V). Yet, these pictures are misleading. 'It is really not the animal but the man himself'. After the struggle with taming the wild ox, the man has reached the state where 'he is no more concerned with gain or loss': an absolute unity between the ox and the ox-herd, in Picture VI. He has noticed that the ox really is himself. Now he does not have to control the ox; the ox can go anywhere it likes, and the ox-herd does not care. In Picture VII we cannot see the ox any more. Once getting everything he

⁸ All the quotations in this section (2. 3. 1.), unless otherwise stated, are from section III (pp198-202) of Daisetz Suzuki's essay *Awakening of a New Consciousness* (1964). The explanation of each picture is fully developed in the section and following pages show the pictures by Kaku-an Shi-en accompanied by his poems to explain each stage.

loses the necessity for the ox – which once was his very purpose. Now he is able to know what he is, by himself. He now realizes his initial mistake: he was searching for something he already had.

2. 3. 2. Dualism to oneness (Picture I - VII)

So far we have looked at the first seven pictures. Let us sum up what we have seen so far. The story of a man's struggle to find the true self unfolds as a step-by-step and chronological progress: *Searching for the Ox – Seeing the Traces – Seeing the Ox – Catching the Ox – Herding the Ox – Coming home on the Ox's Back – The Ox forgotten, Leaving the Man Alone*. The ox-herd gradually becomes closer to the ox, his true self, and finally manages to tame it. Then – very importantly – he realises in fact that his self was always with him: he becomes one with the ox. When one has reached this stage, the liberation of the self has been accomplished.

Let us make a comparison: this image of a man becoming one with his animal with the analogies by the two Western thinkers discussed above. The Western pairs of rider and ridden both portray the human self as being in a constant battle to control the untamed animal. In Schopenhauer's case the rider is helpless in facing the absolute power of the ridden, and in Freud the rider always manages, and has to manage, to control the ridden, however powerful the ridden can be. Like the other two pairs, the ox-herd also tries to tame his ox. However, the fundamental difference between Western and Zen images, particularly between Picture I and VII is that in Zen the rider and ridden eventually become one: the story warns that the two-fold relationship is an illusion and the true self can be only be achieved through the complete oneness or harmony between the two components.

The analysis of the uses of the rider and ridden provides us with distinctive views on the self: the former divides the self into two elements which remain so from the beginning to end; and the latter starts with two, but tries to tell us that the division is a delusion and they should become one. Of course, this analogical juxtaposition is a very interesting visual experiment to appreciate how the two different cultures have different understanding of this very fundamental issue for the whole human society. However, what I really want to show the reader of this thesis is what is told in the rest of the ten pictures.

2. 3. 3. From one to three (Picture VIII - X)

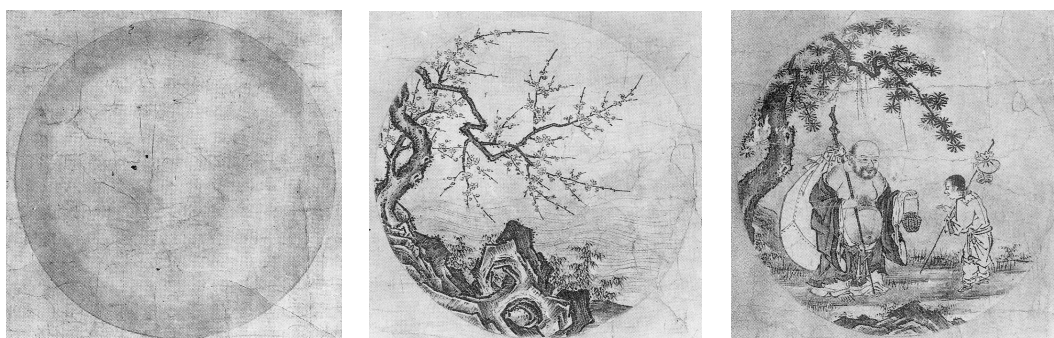


Figure 5: Pictures VIII to X

The story continues for the ox-herd to be awakened to the true self or 'has a *satori*' (Suzuki, 1964: 188). The story has not been completed yet at this point, although one may well wonder how Picture VII, where the ox-herd becomes one with the ox (his self), can be the final destination of his journey. Suzuki also explains this point that 'Picture VII completes the process of self-discipline; it marks the culmination of a struggle that has been going on [...].' (*ibid.*: 200) However, to achieve something higher, the ox-herd has to abandon what he has gained. In other words, the oneness he has achieved has to move on to nothingness (Picture VIII) (Ueda, 1992: 57). This is the story between Picture VII and VIII.

The last three pictures (Figure 5): Pictures VIII: *the Ox and the Man Both Gone Out of Sight*, Picture IX: *Returning to the Origin, Back to the Source*, and Picture X: *Entering the City with Bliss-bestowing Hands* appear to distinguish themselves from the previous seven by their looks. In Picture VIII everything, even the ox-herd the main cast of the story, has disappeared, contradicting the title *Ten Oxherding Pictures*. Picture VIII is a circle with an empty centre. In Picture IX what we see are simply plants and the water flowing behind them. Then, Picture X presents a scene where an elderly man is talking to a younger man on a street.

Because of this sudden disappearance of the main character, one would naturally question the necessity of Pictures VIII to X in the whole story or they might speculate that the last three are dealing with something very different from what the first seven have done so far. It is perhaps both right and wrong to think so. Although the format does not follow the previous ones, Pictures VIII to X are part of the story, for they still teach one about a way to an awakening to a new consciousness. However, it can be said that the story now takes a new turn: the life after enlightenment. Ueda interprets this sudden change of story as a warning for the trainee: the awakening (reaching the absolute oneness between a man and his self shown in Picture VII) is not the end point. One cannot stay or be satisfied with his once achieved enlightenment forever. In other words, to think that there is the complete and fixed self is problematic; it can only be a beginning of a downfall. (Ueda, 1992) Why? To attain enlightenment is not the final destination in Zen. As soon as one is satisfied with the enlightenment, the true self is not with one any more and one's journey starts again.

Let us now delve into a further analysis of what the each picture signifies. The texts below are the poems by Kaku-an which accompany the three pictures quoted in Suzuki's essay (Suzuki, 1964: Appendix XIII-X).

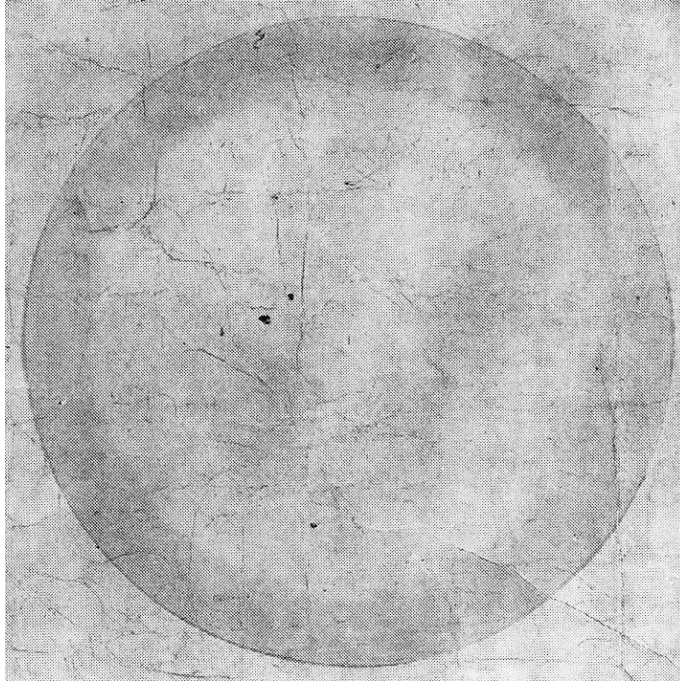


Figure 6: VIII-*The Ox and the Man both Gone Out of Sight*

*All is empty—the whip, the rope, the man, and the ox:
Who can ever survey the vastness of heaven?
Over the furnace of burning ablaze, not a flake of snow can fall:
When this state of things obtains, manifest is the spirit of the
ancient master.*

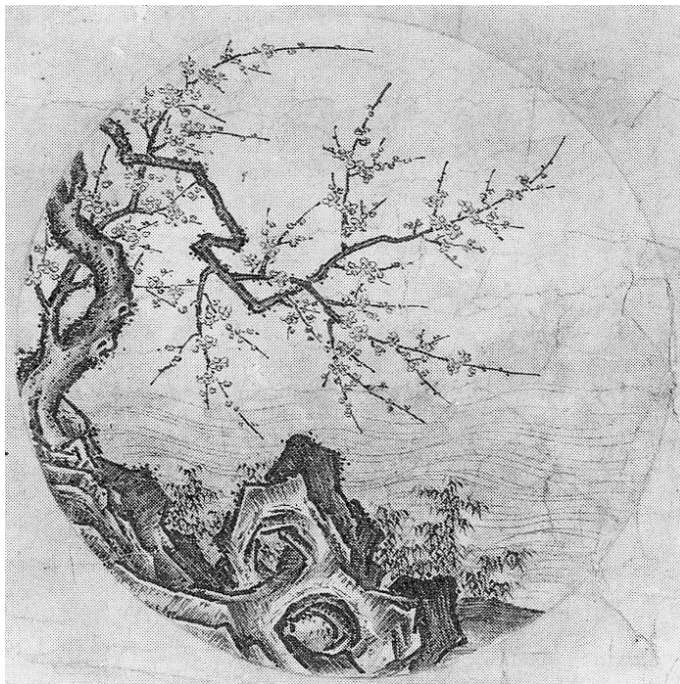


Figure 7: IX-*Returning to the Origin, Back to the Source*

*To return to the Origin, to be back at the Source—already a false step this!
Far better it is to stay at home, blind and deaf, and without much ado;
Sitting in the hut, he takes no cognizance of things outside,
Behold the streams flowing—whither nobody knows; and the flowers vividly red—for whom are they?*



Figure 8: X-Entering the City with Bliss-bestowing Hands

*Bare-chested and barefooted, he comes out into the market place;
Daubed with mud and ashes, how broadly he smiles!
There is no need for the miraculous power of the gods,
For he touches, and lo! the dead trees are in full bloom.*

The most symbolic of the three seems to be Picture VIII. It has two very important roles in the series of pictures. Firstly, it is the changing point between the first seven and the last three. After the first awakening to a new consciousness represented in Picture VII, the ox-herd is about to embark on a second phase of his journey: Aiming to transcend the comfortable completeness in order to get to a higher stage of enlightenment, the ox-herd abandons himself.

Secondly, it links the whole story together to see the self as being 'absolute nothingness'. However, the empty circle does not mean 'nothing' in a negative way. Helen Westgeest says that 'a feature of Zen's thinking in terms of 'oneness' is that the thought process is not based on cause and effect, but on an interconnection of everything, in quality and without a centre' (Westgeest, 1996: 21). In Daisetz Suzuki's words, 'with *satori* [awakening or enlightenment] the whole universe sinks into nothingness' (Suzuki, 1964: 188).

In one sense, *satori* is leaping out of an abyss of absolute nothingness, and in another sense it is going down into the abyss itself. *Satori* is, therefore, at once a total annihilation and a new creation. (*ibid.*)

It's not only humans we are talking about. Suzuki's explanation continues: 'We all – including the man (or boy) and the animal, fields, mountains and rivers – have come from the abyss of absolute nothingness, and we are once more to return to it'. (*ibid.*: 200) This is what the empty circle symbolizes. In other words, the nothingness or emptiness is the source creating everything. It is infinite and never exhausts itself.

Picture IX is the most problematic one of the three. This picture signifies "the Origin or Source" (*ibid.*). From the image, it looks as though it is a view from a circle-shaped window looking out at the nature there. That is to say, this makes us imagine the presence of the viewer. However, Suzuki dismisses this way of thinking. There is not a dualistic connotation of the viewer and the viewed here, i.e. distinction between who perceives and the perceived. He explains this as follows:

[...] the man will never be found "sitting in his hut." Not only does he take cognizance of things going on outside, but he is the things, he is the outside and inside. Nor is he deaf and blind. He sees perfectly well even into the interior of an atom and explores with it where it may fall regardless of its effects. But at the same time he sheds tears over human ignorance, over human follies and

infirmities; he hastens to repair all the damages he has produced, he has contrived every possible way to prevent the recurrence. He is forever kept busy doing this, undoing that. (*ibid.*)

The ox-herd realizes that he is no different from the flowers or the river. Being a human being, he cannot have an experience of being a flower or the river. They are as they are whether he is out there or not. Of course this does not stop him going to see what is out there. Now a fully enlightened man, he goes to the town and meets people (Picture X). To be enlightened to one's true self as a single person it is not enough to understand one's self fully. One has to relate oneself to others even if it may be a predicament for him.

What do the last three pictures try to tell us? Suzuki describes this as the ox-herd completing a process of self-discipline and entering into the 'realm of ontology' (Suzuki, 1964: 200). Unlike the linear unfolding of the true self illustrated in the earlier seven pictures, the last three symbolize three different manifestations of one's selfhood (Ueda, 1992). To me, these three pictures are an important and intriguing, if not the most intriguing, part of the story developed by the series of pictures. This final part of the story is a warning, in a way, to the ox-herd that being satisfied with the state of enlightenment is the beginning of a loss and suggests that there is a higher stage. This illustrates the dynamic and ever-changing nature of the self taught in Zen (Nishida, 1921). Now, we should give them a special attention among the ten pictures to understand the Eastern notion of the self.

2. 4. 0. Three-fold self

This Chapter began with a discussion of the different perceptions of the self in the West and East (particularly Japan), using the visual analogy of

the rider and ridden in the two cultural spheres. In the West, although many different philosophers and thinkers have discussed the matter, one's selfhood is basically perceived as the combination of two fundamental elements: reason and instinct. The rider, reason, is trying to control the ridden, the instinct, whether it succeeds in doing so or not. Then, as the contrast to the idea of dualistic self of the West, our discussion went on to the analysis of the Eastern idea of the self, based on the *Ten Oxherding Pictures* developed in Zen Buddhism. What the set of images of the ox and ox-herd tell us is that if one desires to attain the true self, one has to realize that the division between the rider and ridden is an illusion. They must be united as one. However, the most important discovery in the Zen imagery is that the self actually is considered as the amalgamation of three elements, which was explained using the last three of ten: Pictures VIII to X (Figure 5). In short, the rider and ridden becoming together is just the beginning of one's selfhood recognized as the three-fold structure of three manifestations.

What exactly are the three manifestations of the self? The idea of the self is probably understood better with some example from our actual experience. We would like to consider the use of the first person singular pronoun 'I'. We use the pronoun to refer to ourselves in everyday life often without thinking what it means. The common understanding of the word 'I' for most people is that it is one of the most frequently used words. The singular subjective pronoun is used in various ways, 'from Descartes's deeply philosophical "I think, therefore, I am," via the politically loaded "have a right to vote," to the mundane "I am hungry' (De Waal, 2001: 78). Yet, in any case, the most important thing about the word here is that when I utter the word, I refer to myself and only myself. However, Shizuteru Ueda (2000) claims that the self is not a fixed 'point' but a 'circle', it is not a 'thing' but a 'place'; this means that the whole dynamics including the presence of the other as well as oneself is referred to as 'I'. That is to say, when one says 'I', referring to oneself, this 'I' can simply be

known as the subject of action. On the other hand, when one says 'I', it means also that one presents oneself against the outside world: not only is one conscious of the presence of other or the whole environment one is in, as a subject, but also one sees oneself objectively that one is different from the outside. Ueda argues that we must take it in to consideration that by saying 'I', the single individual person also points him/herself against the outside world. The implication seems to be that we say the word on the condition of somebody else's presence. There are subjective and objective aspects of the phenomenon called 'I'.

In short, firstly, when I say 'I', referring to myself, I indicate myself 'alone'. Secondly, when I say 'I' the assumption is that there is the presence of another 'I' who is not-'I' from my point of view (e.g. the other person before me). Thirdly, when I say, realizing that I am facing not-'I', there has to be a 'place' where this encounter happens. In other words, the phenomenon 'I' needs the single person, being aware of the non-'I' presence, i.e. other people, and standing in a particular place at a particular time. This portrayal of the three aspects of the dynamic presence named 'I' appears to depict the self is represented by the three different states. It is the dynamics of moving between the three phases that creates the whole identity of the self which we refer to as 'I'. Or, it may seem as though one's self (the same self) is looked at from three different directions.

The most noticeable thing described by the pictures is that in the East generally one's self is considered unfixed and dynamic. The most significant difference between this and the Western model discussed above is that in the Western model the self is considered to be with you from the beginning. In Zen, 'the world is seen as a dynamic and constantly changing whole' (Westgeest, 1996: 20). This seems to support that fact the Japanese are considered to have a weaker awareness about their selves as perceivers of the world around them and a strong awareness of being lived by it. The self in our culture is not the centre of the Universe.

Renowned Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida's⁹ account seems to provide the closest explanation, although he is not talking about the pictures. He asserts that the self is experienced, not the experiencing as in Western traditional thought. (Nishida, 1921)

It can be said that the last three pictures, Picture VIII, IX, and X, provide the most *complete* images of the true self (Yanagida, 1992). As a result, it would seem that one's true self is only realized at the point that the ox-herd engages with the self as absolute nothingness, self as realization of the absolute otherness of the other, and self as inter-relationship. Furthermore, if any of these stages is missed the true self will not emerge. However the reader should be reminded that the self is in no sense an accumulation. What the three pictures tell us is that the self is the constant shift between the three states: it is relational – a concept that will play a significant role in the next Chapter.

2. 4. 1. Diagram I: Three-fold self

From what we have discussed so far, the fact that Pictures VIII, IX and X are positioned at the end of the sequence of ten images may be misleading since it gives an impression that these parts of the story provide the chronological conclusion to the earlier stages discussed above. In other words, our narratological turn of mind prevents us from seeing the relational dynamic of these images. In my many discussions with some Buddhists it seems that the journey of the self does not necessarily manifest itself in this kind of succession: it unfolds non-sequentially at particular times in particular places.

⁹ Kitaro Nishida is the most well known Japanese philosopher. Nishida was a friend of Suzuki. Suzuki and Nishida were respectively responsible for making the Zen idea known to people in and out of Japan, as a religion and a philosophy. We will give a closer look at his philosophical ideas in Chapter Three.

It happens contingently. Therefore, it is not, perhaps, appropriate to put the pictures next to one another in a linear progression. As a result I have decided to situate them in a circle (Figure 9). The concept of selfhood in Zen is a dynamic shift between different manifestations: the self as absolute nothingness, self as realization of otherness of the other, and self as inter-relationship.

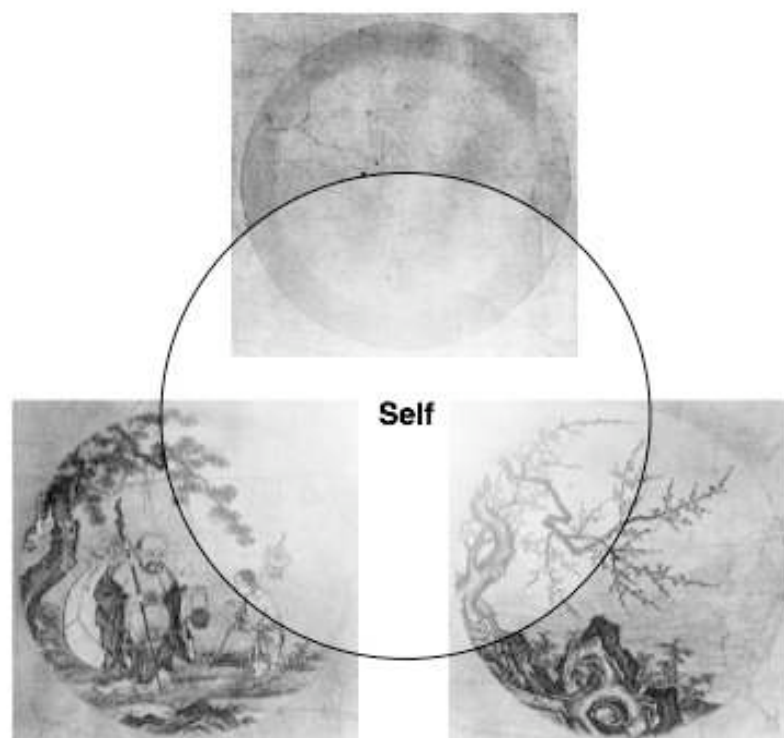


Figure 9: Self as the inter-relationship between Pictures VIII, IX and X

My three-fold view builds on this idea by giving the same weight or significance to each picture. The diagram treats the self as a ceaseless spiral movement. The narratives they contain are not even moving in the same direction around the same two-dimensional circle again and again. It was said above that Picture VIII acts as a bidding force for the whole story. The large circle connecting the three pictures just represents that. They are better seen as a set of three images positioned at equal distance from

the centre of the circle. Here there is no narratological hierarchy, they remain in a constant three-fold interaction at all times. However, it is rather frustrating that my diagram has no feature that expresses the freedom of movement associated with 'ceaseless spiralling'. It would be my hope to improve the diagram as I develop my thinking about these three images, but I feel that my paintings can express the ceaseless spiral. We will discuss this point in the later Chapter where we look into my practice, but for the present, let us assume that the triadic formula I have created for this diagram offers a way of thinking that will let us move our discussion forward to the next stage.

Some might argue that my proposition does not follow Zen's teaching. I am not in a position to argue with them for I am not practising the religion. However, I am fascinated by Zen as a philosophy and, simply as a person practising in a group environment, I am interested in this idea because it will allow me to think myself consists not only of me as a single individual independent from everything and everybody else, but also of me surrounded by other people and environment, particularly my group membership, as part of myself.

What the circle diagram demonstrates to us, with the large circle joining the three components, is that all three are necessary to constitute a 'complete' and true self. The three, being together in an endless movement, create a sense of the dynamic, processual and relational nature of the self. This triadic diagram, although it is not yet perfect as I pointed out above, seems indeed to be the key to our investigation into the relationship between individuality and groupness in the rest of this thesis; this should help this thesis to overcome its possibility of becoming a simple study of cultural differences. In the succeeding Chapter we will explore ways by which we can convert this diagram illustrating the nature of the self, into one which can describe the individual person. I hope to

achieve this by introducing Charles Sanders Peirce's theory and comparing his ideas with the Zen view on the self.

Chapter Three - Triadic relations and the individual

3. 0. Peircean triadic relations and Zen idea of the self

The argument so far has been based on a notion of the self in Zen by contrasting it to the traditional Western way of thinking, which is fundamentally two-fold or dualistic (Figure 3, page 25). However, is it something so special about the Eastern culture to think this way about the self? Of course, the purpose of our investigation in this thesis is not to offer some sort of mysterious Eastern thought which can be perceived as Zen or Buddhist thoughts by the Western reader. The aim of the following sections is to achieve, based on the three-fold relationship of one's self found above (as demonstrated in the triad diagram (Figure 9)), a clearer and more profound understanding of the relational feature, particularly the triad formula, of one's selfhood, so we will be equipped with a tool to examine the nature of one's individuality in Chapter Four. My method of achieving such a goal is to juxtapose a counterpart in the Western culture and compare it with the Zen three-fold view of the self and another diagram as a result of that.

As such a counterpart, we may introduce the theories developed by the American Pragmatist philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) who is known for his semiotic philosophy: 'of the triadic nature of communication, of iconic, indexical and symbolic signs, and of his categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness' (Wheeler 2008: 8). Among his extensive research on mathematics and natural sciences and the range of ideas he developed from them, our special attention may be drawn to his theory of triadic relation of the 'categories of the universe's processes' (Merrell 2001: 385): Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness.

As far as my understanding of Zen Buddhism or Peircean semiotics extends, neither of them is specially concerned with issues of individuality; Zen is a religion as well as a thought process aiming at the attainment of the true self; and being a natural scientist and mathematician, Peirce's semiotic theory concerns the dynamic relationship of signs in the natural world. Nevertheless, the two sets of ideas both articulate issues of human selfhood, at least to some extent. For Zen, the liberation of the self is their final destination. Peirce's theory of signs concerns all possible signs in the world, that naturally include phenomena or concepts called the self. If, as Peirce writes, the entire universe is 'perfused with signs' (Peirce 1998: 394), things like one's selfhood or individuality can be signs, too, and interpreted as the relationship between the three categories.

I claim expertise neither in Zen Buddhist thought nor Peircean semiotics, though the assumption, and hope, here is that Peircean semiotics, combined with the Zen three-fold view of the self, is the key to the development of triadic ways to interpret one's individuality. As a fine art practitioner seeking individuality based on group involvement, I hope that these views will provide us with interesting tools to bring together singularity and group-oriented views of the individual usually considered at least very different – not to say even the opposite of each other. In the following sections, we shall look at Peirce's ideas, particularly semiotics and triadic relations, followed by a further look at the Zen triadic view of the self in order to examine the similarities and differences between the triadic relationship developed by both Zen and Peirce.

3. 1. Peircean theories

The key feature of Peirce's semiotics, in relation to this thesis, is that his triadic relations are a departure from more simple dyadic relations. Interestingly, this coincides with the argument above on the nature of the

self as three-fold instead of two-fold. The discovery of Charles Sanders Peirce's three categories is, of course, very compelling for the development of this thesis, fitting, as it does, with the speculation that we could adopt the triadic diagram representing one's selfhood in Zen introduced in the previous Chapter (Figure 9), into Peirce's theory of triadic relationships. So it is hoped that this triadic view, combined with the Zen view of the self, will give us a vehicle to use in our later discussion on the individual-group relationship. The method will be based on using the triadic diagram.

Needless to say, this thesis is not the place to investigate Charles Sanders Peirce's vast and wide range of ideas, which are said to be very demanding for any reader of his philosophy to comprehend fully (De Waal 2001). However, before moving on to a discussion of his idea of triadic relations, it would be appropriate to consider some of Peirce's theory related to this thesis, very briefly, in order for us to understand why Peirce is the person to be drawn upon in the development of our discussion of the self.

These categories have drawn my attention because they appear to be strikingly similar to the three manifestations of the self in Zen investigated in the previous Chapter, in terms, most obviously, of the number. Also, very crucially, Peirce's development of the triadic relations was a departure from the traditional Western dyadic way of thinking. The theory is especially interesting because of his rather impassioned anti-Cartesian standpoint. Arguably, the key characteristic of his entire philosophy is that he firmly stands against the Western tradition based on Descartes' philosophy (De Waal 2001, Merrell 2001, Wheeler 2006). At this point of the thesis, in which we try to compare Zen and Peircean theories, this aspect of Peirce's theory seems to be particularly useful and encouraging, because this seems to coincide with the argument on the move from simplistic dualism to more complex relations above. His theories do seem

to support the approach to the self as dynamic and relational from a similar but different point of view. These categories will be looked at in more detail in the following sections.

Not only the triadic relations, through the study of C. S. Peirce's semiotic ideas, but also his insights into the public nature of the self and the transdisciplinarity of his semiotic thought are very helpful in providing a Western dimension to the conception of the three-fold view of one's selfhood. The significance of his idea of triadic relations for the writer is exactly his departure from the philosophical tradition of Cartesian dualism, as we have just seen. Peirce claimed the communal nature of inquiry, unlike Descartes. It was noticeable from our initial literature review that many assert that Descartes who talked about 'the indubitability of first-person experience' (Kemerling, 1997-2001) gave rise to the Western tradition of individuality. For Descartes, the subject (knower) is clearly divided from the object (known). Above all, the subject is the owner of the knowledge.

On the other hand, Peirce claims that the knowledge belongs to the society or community, not to the individual subject. De Waal explains this as follows:

For Descartes, who took a firm stance against scholastic reliance on authority, the acquisition of knowledge falls entirely within the scope of a single individual. [...] Peirce in contrast, made the acquisition of knowledge a straightforwardly social affair in which the idiosyncrasies of individual inquiries are eventually filtered out. For Peirce, one should accept the authority of others, unless there is real reason to doubt it. Scientists generally trust the authority of other scientists, especially of those who work in highly specialized fields in which one is not oneself a specialist. The community and not the individual is the locus of truth. (De Waal 2001: 37-38)

For Peirce, the individual enquirer has 'limitations in circumstances, power, and bent' (Peirce, 1992: 89) which are the source of error.

However, ‘allowing for enough time and keeping in mind that anything can at least in principle be fully inquired into, such a communal inquiry will eventually overcome ignorance and eliminate error, which is as much as to say that it will reach the truth.’ (De Waal, 2001: 36) This Western idea should help us understand further the three-ness of our selfhood derived from the Zen way of understanding one’s self. In preparation for the subsequent part of this section where we will finally look at Peirce’s triadic relations and take a close look at each of the three categories, I would like to start with some words on Peircean semiotics in which the three categories are discussed to understand the significance of his theory by making a contrast with Saussurean semiology.

Semiotics, a doctrine of signs¹⁰, had existed before Peirce, but he developed it. Peircean semiotics is often contrasted to another dominant school of semeiotic, semiology developed by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) (De Waal, 2001; Wheeler, 2006 and 2008). Both de Saussure and Peirce deal with human meaning but their approaches were different: Saussurean semiology is essentially dyadic; i.e. ‘a sign relates a signifier (that which that does the signifying) to something signified’ (De Waal, 2001: 70)¹¹. On the other hand, Peircean semiotic is a triadic view on signs (icon, index and symbol). The main concern of Saussure’s semiology is the signs symbolized by language and social psychology, whereas Peircean semiotic looks more widely at every sign in the world including the natural world.

¹⁰ Semiotics is ‘the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation’ (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 2006*: 1309). Peirce defines sign ‘as anything that stands for something to someone’ (De Waal, 2001: 70) and ‘as sign is something that relates something that relates something else (its object) to a third (its meaning, or as Peirce called it, its interpretant) (*ibid.*: 68)

¹¹ De Waal compares De Saussure’s dyadic notion of sign with ‘the relationship between the two elements of the sign with the two side of a sheet of paper; if one removes (parts of) one side, one will affect equally the other side.’ (*ibid.*: 70)

Being a natural scientist, Peirce did not think semiology, which is concerned just with articulate human language, was enough. Wheeler describes that 'semiological (Saussurean) escape from nature, in which human meaning is believed to be restricted to articulate language alone, must give way to a wider semiotics (Peircean) understanding, in which embodied acts and deeds are more clearly understood as meaningful signs also' (Wheeler, 2006: 157). In other words, unlike his contemporary, Peirce saw that the entire universe we live in is 'perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs' (Peirce, 1998: 394). We come to know something, because we are a part of the universe, and if the universe is 'perfused with signs' we also are signs. 'Not only are you a sign to others, but first and foremost, you are nothing but a sign to yourself.' (De Waal, 2001: 71) Peirce asserts that signs always give rise to new signs.¹² Also, Peirce shares the idea of the unfixed self with that of Zen. According to De Waal, for Peirce 'the self is acquired; it is not something we are born with,' (*ibid.*: 79) and Peirce's conception of the self and the human person is completely against how people have come to see themselves in the West. Again, it is my hope that the Zen view of the self can be enhanced by Peircean semiotics, particularly by his concept of triadic relationships.

This thesis does not need to explore the full range of the Peircean philosophy, but it is clear that his view of the communal and relational nature of everything in the world shares a lot with oriental thinking. We have said enough about Peircean basics to proceed to the next stage which will explore Peirce's theory of the three categories.

¹² Peirce gave a special name to this unlimited sign process. That is 'semeiosis' or 'sign action' (De Waal, 2001: 71). As Peirce puts it, this involves 'a cooperation of three subjects, such as a sign, its object and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs' (Peirce, 1998: 411).

3. 2. Peircean triadic relations

We now move to Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of triadic relationship. Although this thesis is not designed for offering an extensive study of Peircean philosophy, it is at least necessary for us to understand the characteristics of the three categories and their relationships in order to compare them with the three manifestations of the self in Zen. The central idea of the philosophy of Peirce above all, argues Kunitake Ito (2006), is that every single thing in the Universe, from organic to inorganic substances, and from the physical to spiritual, is categorized into Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness. The categories work just like the periodic table of the chemical elements, a framework used to classify, systematize, and evaluate all of the different forms of chemical action (Ito, 2006: 78). We should first remind ourselves of what Peirce himself says. Let us imagine that:

There are three kinds of interest we may take in a thing. First, we may have a primary interest in it for itself. Second, we may have a secondary interest in it on account of its reactions with other things. Third, we may have a mediatory interest in it, in so far as it conveys to a mind an idea about a thing. In so far as it does this, it is a sign or representation. (Peirce, 1998: 5)

These three kinds of interest in a thing are named Firstness, Secondness or Thirdness. Floyd Merrell explains that Firstness relates itself to Secondness, and Thirdness mediates between Firstness and Secondness and the relationships are described as follows:

Firstness is what it is, without any relationship whatsoever with any other. It is self-contained, self-reflexive, and self-sufficient. Secondness is what it is, insofar as it enters into relationship with something other, interacting with it in the sense of something possibly acting as a sign and the second something acting as the object of the sign. Thirdness is what it is, in the respect that it brings Firstness and Secondness together by mediating between them, and hence it brings itself into interaction with them in the same way

they are brought into interaction with each other. (Merrell, 2001: 385-6)

In other words, Firstness is:

anything that can possibly be thought of brings with it the idea of some *thing*. This introduces the category of a first that is to say, of something that is entirely independent of any reference to anything else' (De Waal, 2001: 10).

Because this *thing* requires no relationship with any other things, it is a mere possibility indicating vagueness and openness: this is simply a 'feeling of something'. Imagine that you walk in to a room filled with the colour of red; the 'red-ness' immediately hits you. It may be warming or alarming, reminding you of the colour of the sunlight or blood, but the 'red-ness' you are feeling is Firstness. Secondness, the brutal fact bound to the force of nature (Ito, 2006), is found in action and reaction, cause and effect. This means that *otherness* is now involved. 'Secondness is that mode of being in virtue of which it has an impact on something else to which it is second, but without regard of anything else.' (De Waal, 2001: 10) It is the fact in front of your eye that the walls, floor and ceiling of the room has been turned red; they may be sprayed with a lot of red paint, or a red light projected on them. The colour is causing you to feel warm or alarmed. Fitzgerald (1966) analyzes that the relationship between something and something else not as an opposition, but rather, it is like an individual identifying itself by facing the other. Thirdness is a medium of connection 'which is that mode of being that derives its identity entirely from it relating two objects to one another' (De Waal, 2001: 10). It represents representation, generality, community and law. 'The relation of a first to a second [...] brings with it the notion of mediation' (*ibid.*); that is, of setting two objects in relation to one another. You now *know* that the feeling of warmth or alarm you are feeling is caused by the red-ness. This sense-making process belongs to the category of Thirdness.

Summing up, in the Peircean theory we have looked at so far, every thing in the world, whether physical materials or abstract ideas – that includes ourselves – can be a sign. Another significance of Peirce's three categories is that they cannot be understood as separated entities. 'Evolution inscribes the emergence of Secondness from Firstness, and of Thirdness from Secondness and Firstness' (Wheeler, 2008: 9). The categories exist in relation to the others. This theory will hopefully help us to develop the earlier diagram of the three-fold view of the self in Zen, depending on what we decide to talk about. Like the Zen view of the ever-changing self that we have seen above, this can allow one to think of oneself as part of the sign process. We will discuss the three categories in relation to one's individuality in a later section. In the next section, in the meanwhile, I would like to move to the comparison between the Zen and Peircean triadic relations, using the triadic diagram formula, in order to examine what Peircean semiotics can add to the Zen idea to deepen our understanding of the formula and one's individuality explained by it.

3. 3. 0. Diagram II: Comparisons between Zen and Peirce

Let us now consider whether the triadic relationship between the three categories in Peircean semiotics could be comparable to the Zen idea of the triadic relational self. We have gone, albeit very briefly, through the Peircean concept of triadic relations between Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness above. From what we have seen so far we should identify interesting similarities between the Zen (Japanese) ideas about selfhood depicted in the *Ten Oxherding Pictures* and the Peircean idea of triadic relations of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness. The two sets of three, from both Zen and Peirce, are intricately interrelated and always operate together as three. My assumption, of course, is that it is possible to illustrate the Peircean triadic relations in the format of the triadic diagram

between Pictures VIII, IX and X of the *Ten Oxherding Pictures* (Figure 9, page 38). Needless to say, the two sets are not exactly identical in terms of the meaning of the each component, but I believe that they resemble each other enough, particularly due to their concerns with the relational nature of the three in terms of the fluid, i.e. non-sequential, movement between each element, to make this transition. Therefore, it may be possible, at least provisionally, to replace Picture VIII with Firstness, Picture IX with Secondness, and Picture X with Thirdness (Figure 10).

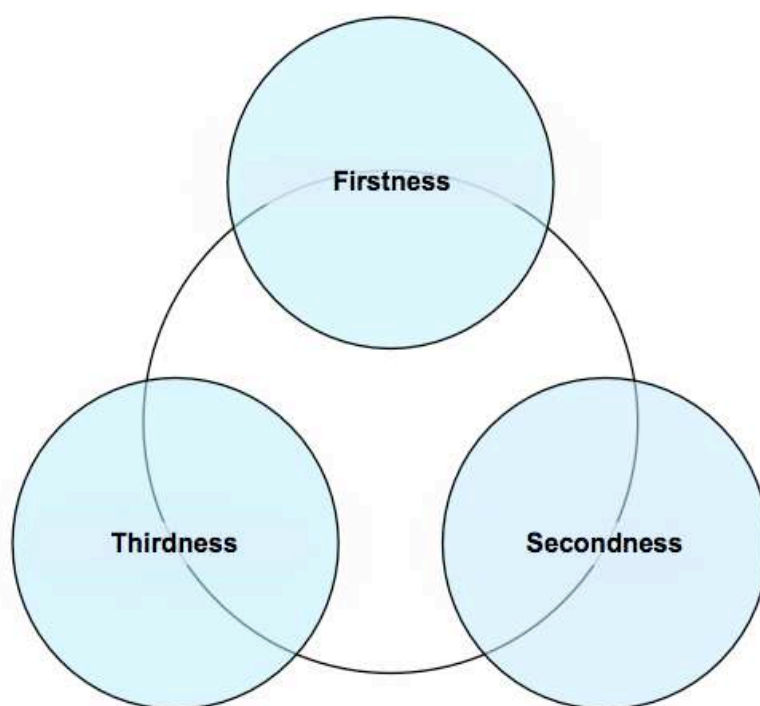


Figure 10: Triadic relation of Peirce's three categories

3. 3. 1. Further comparison

We shall now make a more detailed comparison between the Peirce and Zen triadic relations in order to help us understand them better through analyzing their differences and similarities. It is probably worth recapitulating the Zen idea of the self that unfolds in the story in the *Ten Oxherding Pictures* before bringing it together with the Peircean three

semiotics. Among the ten pictures which illustrate the process of a man's endeavour to attain his true self, the final three images, Pictures VIII, IX and X, differed in their characters from the other seven showing progressive stages of training to realize that the ox-herd and his ox (metaphor of his true self), which he thought he had lost, were in fact one. Then, what seemed to be the end of the story of attaining the true self actually had an underlying story. The story was that the self is a ceaseless movement between the three different manifestations of the self, which are shown in the last three pictures.

In Picture VIII the previous narrative (Picture I to VII) disappears into the void of the empty circle of Picture VIII. Steve Odin, the author of *the Social Self in Zen and American Pragmatism*, describes the three Pictures, referring to the interpretation by the Japanese Philosopher Shizuteru Ueda which is based on his influence from the Kyoto School philosophy¹³. Ueda reads the *Oxherding Pictures* as the view that the self is really nothing but relationship with its environment:

According to Ueda, the *Ten Oxherding Pictures* illustrates the Zen Buddhist process of self-realization wherein the ego-self at the level of Being as portrayed in the first seven stations undergoes death or self negation in the void of relative Nothingness as shown by the empty circle as the eighth station, only to be resurrected as a true self in the boundless openness of absolute Nothingness wherein emptiness is fullness and fullness is emptiness as portrayed by the last two stations. (Odin, 1996: xiii)

The circle with a hollow inside alerts us that reaching the state of the true self can only be done by discarding the unnecessary. After all, the self really is absolute nothingness. This is, however, not negative void; the empty circle symbolizes both a death of the self and its birthplace. Nishida

¹³ The Kyoto School and its philosophy (they philosophized the Buddhist thought, including Zen) will be explained in more detail in Chapter Four, but I would like to point out that it is known as the philosophy of Nothingness (Heisig, 2001).

argues that ‘the true personality comes forth when a person eradicates them and forgets their self (Nishida, 1921: 130), discarding all artificial assumptions, doubt whatever can be doubted, and proceed on the basis of direct and indubitable knowledge (Nishida, 1921), until ‘the Emptiness itself’ becomes ‘I’ (Abe, 1985: 13). It is the ‘direct and pure experience’, a raw experience, before any sense-making process comes into effect (Nishida, 1921: 39).

The true self-awareness of absolute nothingness, in which the direct experience cannot be separated from the experiencing, seems to suggest infinite singleness. ‘[S]ameness or repetition [...] constitute Peirce’s Universe of Firstness or semiotic potentiality.’ (Wheeler, 2008: 9) The ‘directness’ and ‘pureness’ of an experience shares its essence with the Universe of Firstness. Firstness is a state of the purest of pure quality of phenomena not having undergone any sense-making process (Ito, 2002: 104-105). The Zen idea is more spiritual; although Zen absolute nothingness more conclusively says that there is not a thing, both Zen and Peirce suggest that the first stage talks about possibility/potential. And both Picture VIII and Firstness provide the ground or basis to the other two.

Next, we look at Picture IX and Secondness. Picture IX ‘portrays how the true self returns from the void to the suchness of phenomena in the undivided aesthetic continuum of nature at the level of immediate experience’ (Odin, 1996: xiii). In the picture there are only some plants before a river. What does it try to say about the true human self? This represents the encounter between the self and other which is represented in a form of nature. After realizing the self is nothingness, one becomes conscious that here are other selves, but at the same time one faces the fact that the other selves are independent of one through and through. The second phase of the true self in Zen is the realization of the otherness of the others. Nishida calls this ‘I and you’ relationship. When Nishida refers

to 'I and you', his concern is this encounter should enable one to have a deeper awareness of one's own self through confronting the other, who is absolutely different from you – and whom it is utterly impossible to understand.

The Japanese psychopathologist Bin Kimura (2005) claims that it is the point of contact between 'I' and the other (which can be 'you') which gives one a realization of one's 'I'-ness. When one says 'I', it means one has other in front of me. Yet, the 'I' will never understand this person or thing, i.e. the other, in front of it. This is what Kitaro Nishida named the 'absolute other' (Nishida, 1962). The other is living in a 'non-world' that is completely different from the one's world, of which one cannot be the centre. (Kimura, 2005: 68). This is the idea symbolised by Picture IX.

Whereas, Peirce's Universe of Secondness consists of 'indexical signs which are characterised by cause and effect relations; one sign is related to another and points to it' (Wheeler, 2008: 9). Unlike the Universe of Firstness which is a chaos and openness of possibilities, the Universe of Secondness is bound by the law of nature – incidentally, talking of nature, Picture IX also shows nature in it represented by the plants and river – the brute fact and the relationship between action and reaction. It is as though one who has been enjoying the infinite possibilities gets thrown into the ruthless reality (Ito, 2006). The dyadic relationship between self and other suggested by Picture IX may seem similar to the action-reaction relationship entailed in the Universe of Secondness, but are in fact not as comparable as the previous pair. This is because Picture IX is not an indication of a causal relationship between two things. Rather it is a wild realization of the other which is incomprehensible. However, the characteristic they have in common, that is, action-reaction relations and the self-other encounter, both communicate something 'immediate' or spontaneous.

Picture X shows a monk who goes out to the town meeting people: one's self cannot possibly be based solely on a single discrete agent who is the centre of one's experience of the world out there. According to Odin, this final image 'depicts the realization of a relational self in the between of I and Thou as revealed by the iconographic image of a compassionate Bodhisattva returning from the void to everyday life in the human community' (Odin, 1996: xiii). Odin's argument is in the comparison between the Zen and Pragmatist philosophy in terms of their concern with the I-Thou dialectic relationship. Indeed, he suggests the view of the self is relational and social, but in our discussion here does not conform to his claim. The self needs to relate itself to a place or context to exist. The Universe of Thirdness is composed of symbolic signs which 'are conventional, not necessary' (Wheeler, 2008: 9). That is, the importance of this third category is that it mediates Firstness and Secondness by giving the relationship between them a framework to operate within, as Wheeler explains:

Human Thirdness¹⁴ – the recognition of similarity (this is like that), of difference in similarity (this is like that and also always points to something else), and of the possibility that signs can point to, and stand for, other things in non-causal (i.e. merely conventional) ways – thus always contains iconic, indexical and symbolic signs. (*ibid.*)

Not as 'necessary' or fundamental as the other two categories it may be, but this third element completes the whole circle and creates dynamics to the whole thing.

As mentioned in the beginning of this Chapter, the aim here is to bring the two different realms, the Zen idea of the self and the Peircean categories of universal process together, using a diagram of triadic relations. Indeed, we definitely identify remarkable similarities between the Zen ideal of the

¹⁴ All living things inhabit the first two Universes; only humans (and possibly some apes, to some extent) inhabit in the Universe of Thirdness: the higher (later) grows out of lower (prior or antecedent). (Wheeler, 2008: 9)

self as the triadic relationship between self as nothingness, self as realization of the other and self as interrelationship, and Peircean semiotics of the triadic relationship between three categories. Comparison between such different thought systems may be insightful and fascinating. However, the important distinction between them probably is the fact that the issue of the self based on the ideas around the self as mainly debated in Zen Buddhism can be taken as highly religious or spiritual, teaching the 'process of crafting oneself into an ideal person' (Odin, 1996: xiii), thus not related to our everyday life. Whereas Peircean semiotics is more scientific, yet the openness of it allows us to keep some distance from the spirituality and to improve the adaptability of the triadic relationship further than just a visualization of the nature of the self. Most importantly, this shift will hopefully allow the diagram to be interpreted in many ways, other than just the issue of the self, because of the Peircean triadic relation's adaptable and flexible characteristics. The discovery of the tri-relational self in Zen made it possible for us to include the group to be part of the self. The outcome of the above discussion on Zen and Peirce perhaps allows us to move to the next stage: the discussion on the individual. We are going to examine the nature of the individual using the diagram below, but ahead of that we should consider improving the diagram itself graphically for it to acquire more dynamism and fluidity.

3. 3. 2. Improvement to the diagram

We should now come back to the issue of the validity of the diagram: does it really illustrate the essence of the triadic relations? It was mentioned in Chapter Two, in our investigation on the self, that the three manifestations interrelate with each other but they do not occur in a particular order. The diagram shown then consisted of three elements connected by a circle. The aim of the diagram was to help us recognize that the self has to be understood as a unity of the three elements or a realm where the elements

move freely to make up a dynamic self. It was my concern that the simple circle, although it can show the unity, does not quite express the sense of free and non-sequential movement between the three elements. Incidentally, during my study of Peircean semiotics, particularly the triadic relationship between the three categories, I came across a diagram created by Floyd Merrell (2001: 387, see Figure 11 below) that illustrates the relationship between the three categories in his article *Lotman's semiosphere, Peirce's categories and cultural forms of life*. Merrell describes the relationship between the three categories as 'interrelations' like the Zen description of the three manifestations of the Self. Above all, what fascinates me is the fact that he uses a diagram, like myself, to show the interrelations visually. Hopefully, this further development of the triad diagram will allow us better to understand the relationship we have been looking at.

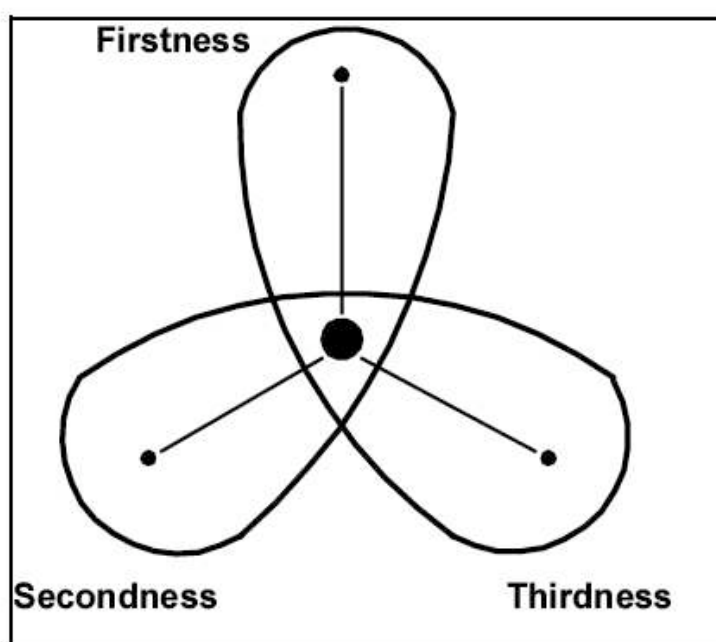


Figure 11: 'The categories' by Floyd Merrell

Merrell explains his diagram of categories:

Notice how they are “democratic”, since each category is interrelated with the other two in the same way they are interrelated with each other. Notice that the model is not “triangular”, but rather, there are three lines meeting at a point in the form of “tripod” such that there cannot be merely a binary relation between one category and another, for the relations between any two categories are possible solely by means of interrelations between all three categories. Notice also that the swirling lines illustrating the processual character of these interrelations make up a Borromean knot, well known in mathematical topology. The Borromean knot exercises a move from the two-dimensional sheet towards three-dimensionality with the overlapping lines. This is significant [...]. For the three lines making up the categorical interrelations are not merely two-dimensional. They are more properly conceived as a triangle seen from above, that, as a result of the swirling lines of the Borromean knot, oscillate forward and backward. Thus the three-dimensionality of “semiotic space”. (Merrell, 2001: 386)

This description of his diagram of three categories seems to match what I wanted to achieve, thus could provide a further development in our diagram. Reflecting back to the triadic diagram of Zen view on the self in Chapter Two (Figure 9, page 38), the circle could illustrate the fact that there is no starting or end point in the triadic relation, but it was rather too simple and monotonous to communicate the vigour of the relation. The significance of introducing this ‘Borromean knot’¹⁵ to the original diagram is that, as Merrell points out, it can express ‘three-dimensionality’ in the relationship between the three categories. Furthermore, the most important characteristic of this mathematic shape is that if one part gets disconnected, the whole link will also collapse (Cromwell, 2007). This seems to help us clarify the meaning of the interrelatedness of the three: it is not a flow but is a space as Merrell refers to Lotman’s ‘semiotic space’. It may well suggest that it is possible for us to perceive the individual as a three-dimensional space.

¹⁵ For more details (the origin and use of the shape) of Borromean knots (also known as Borromean rings), see *Borromean Rings Homepage* by Peter Cromwell (2007)

Although it is still difficult to express the fluid and unrestrained nature of the triadic relationship (which the lines in my paintings can), the knot will definitely improve the diagram by lending it a third dimension. Therefore, I would like to adopt this shape of three linked rings to my triadic diagrams of Zen self (Figure 9) and Peircean three categories (Figure 10). The results are seen in the diagrams below (Figures 12 and 13).

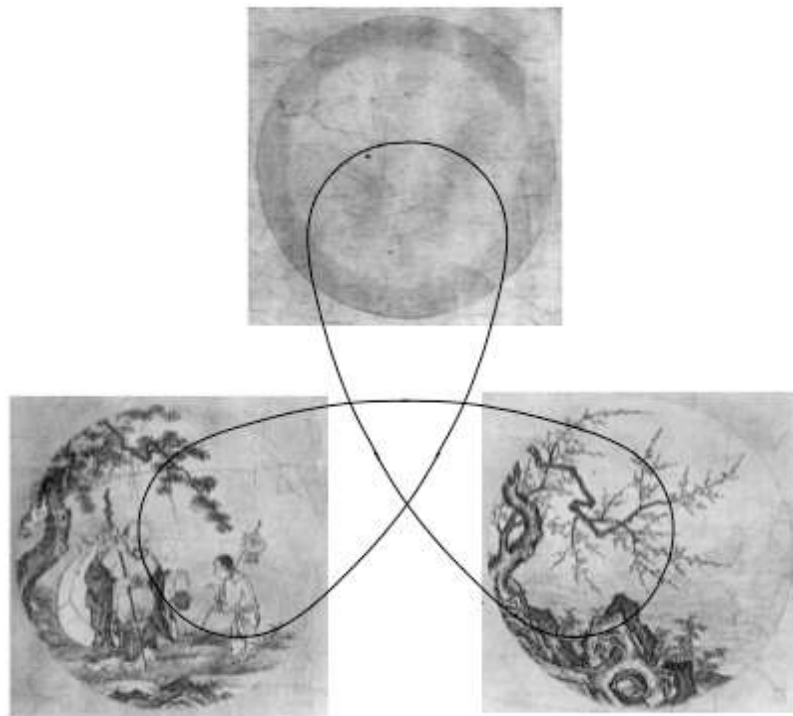


Figure 12: Three-fold self in Zen 2

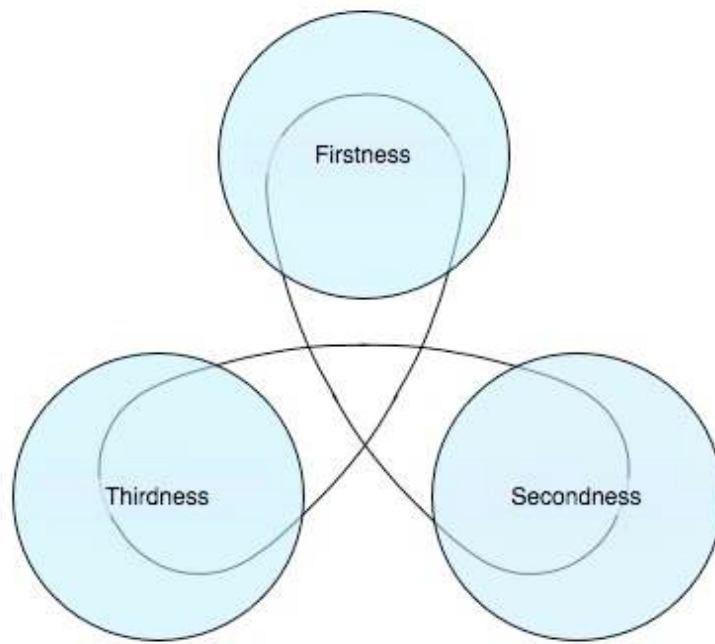


Figure 13: Peirce's three categories 2

These diagrams should help us be 'visually' aware of the dynamic relationships between the three elements of both Peircean semiotics and Zen. We shall use this more three dimensional image with respect to the triadic diagram from now on. Next, we should come back to the main subject: how can understanding the triadic relationship help us develop a triadic view of one's individuality?

3. 4. Diagram III: Firstness as one's individuality

Let us first summarize the story thus far. The journey through Chapter Three has been about developing the three-fold view of one's individuality. The Zen ideal form of the self as a relationship between the three different representations: the self as nothingness, the self's realization of the other, and the self as interrelation, was identified in the previous Chapter. The three-fold formation of one's self was turned into a triadic diagram illustrating the relationship (Figure 9). This process provided us with an

interesting insight into the self as the whole package of the three provided from this process has been further examined and widened out to talk about one's individuality by making comparison between the spiritual world of Zen and the semiotic view of C. S. Peirce in this Chapter. Even before our detailed analysis of differences and similarities between the two theories, Peirce's triadic relations between the three categories seemed easily adaptable to the three-fold diagram (Figure 10). Surely, the comparison between two very different ideas using 'three' itself is stimulating, and we, indeed, discovered a lot of similarities. Yet, the most important thing, as already mentioned, about the above investigation is that Peircean semiotics allowed the aesthetics and spirituality of the Zen view to subside so we can delve into more open-ended possibility to use the triadic relational discussions on other than one's selfhood. Also, the visualization of the relationships using the triadic diagram has been improved, thanks to Floyd Merrell's diagram (Figure 11) illustrating Peircean categories and their relationships, so that the problem with depicting the dynamic and flexible relationships with a simple circle in the Zen triadic diagram, although not completely yet, has been solved (Figure 12).

Having gone through all these, we should now be in a position to talk about one's individuality in the triadic relations. Let us see what is happening if we use the triadic diagram to discuss one's individuality. Thirdness and Picture X both indicate the relational nature of one's selfhood. It seems natural to think, because of the singularity of the individual person, to put the individual into the Firstness spot. If the individual self is Firstness, what comes to Secondness? Presumably, following both Zen and Peirce, the Secondness position may well be filled with the encounter between the self and the other. And in the Thirdness position, groups where we easily imagine the self interacting with other people and the environment.

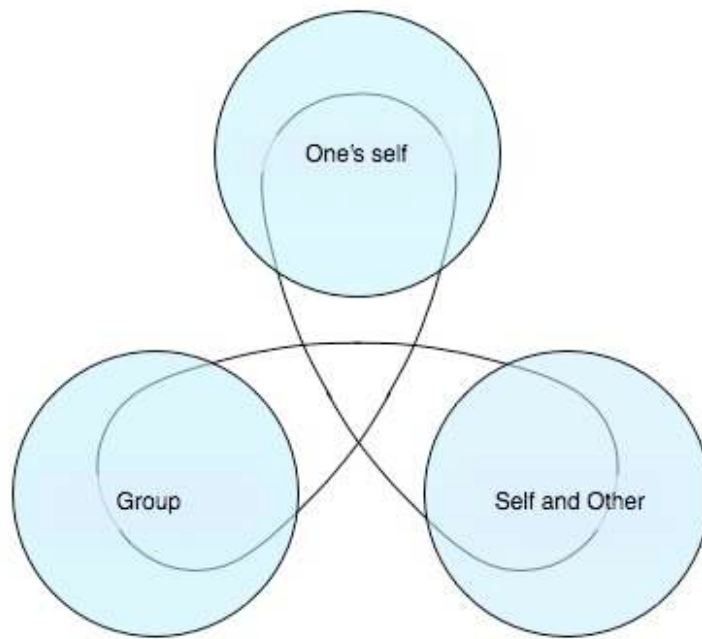


Figure 14: The individual

We have learnt this, from both Firstness in Peircean semiotics and the idea of the absolute nothingness (Picture VIII) in Zen. They share their absolute singularity, or even a state before becoming single. They indicate something vague, just possibility or potential. Most importantly they both mark the primary point of the relationships. Because this stage talks about singularity, one can easily assume that the individuality of a person goes into the first circle. The second one is two-ness as it requires the presence of the other and the realization of the other. The third one represents the relational aspects. In order to achieve a general understanding or meaning of something, there needs to be agreement. We may suppose this relationship can be represented in groups (i.e. relationship between more than two people), which goes into the third circle (Figure 14).

We want eventually to consider applying the thought experiment to visual art practice and practitioners to understand individuality in the creative realm in Chapter Five. This Chapter has tried to set up a foundation, or tool, for the following discussions. But before we move into the discussion

on the creative individual, it may perhaps be necessary to look more carefully at what the individual is, deriving from the above views on one's selfhood.

Chapter Four - Groupness and Individuality: towards a definition of groupness

4. 0. 0. Individual based on groupness

The aim of this Chapter is to provide a place to consider the meaning of being an individual and to develop a further and possibly a new understanding of the concept of the individual. When one thinks of one's own selfhood, one intuitively thinks of the individual or single self. It appears to be the common perception that the self resides, as does individuality, in the individual person, but is that really so? Having seen in Chapter Three that there are ways of thinking that one's self involves not only the individuality of the person but also their relationship with the environment, including other human beings, one may wonder if such a perception is really right. Of course, the question 'What is an individual?' entails the issues of what the self is and human cognition, etc. which have always been debated by human beings of different times, from ordinary people to various thinkers and philosophers. However, the answers to such questions are far from obvious (and it is not the point of this thesis to find *the* answer), and possibly this issue will never have a definite answer ever. For this reason alone this Chapter will be very challenging, but I am not too pessimistic about this. I think that this undecided matter gives us to a space to find our own way to interpret it. And hopefully, at the very least, the result of the following investigation and discussion will be an interesting suggestion for this profound matter.

Throughout the subsequent sections, we will explore the meaning of individuality through an exploration of socio-cultural meaning of individual and group in the West and Japan. The issue we would like to consider here is why it has to be the individual that one's perception of the self is based on, and whether it is possible to determine this through exploring the meaning of the term 'groupness'. I would like to propose that we

discuss the relationship between individual and group through which definitions of the term 'groupness' will be developed. What does 'groupness' mean? I shall explain what I mean by saying groupness in detail in the later section, but, first of all, it is necessary for the reader to see where it comes from.

4. 0. 1. The Kyoto School: the starting point

The use of the term 'groupness' has been developed by the writer, inspired by my reading of the Japanese school of philosophy, the Kyoto School¹⁶, particularly that of Kitaro Nishida (1870-1945). The claim of the Kyoto School, according to Cooper (2003: 7), is that selfness grows out of 'the greater whole'. The claim of the Kyoto School was that 'individuals are "abstractions" from the larger wholes which are their "place" and "mediate" them' (Cooper, 2003: 7). Starting from the Buddhist teaching that all things are dependently originated and therefore there is no such thing as the self which is substantial, Nishida insisted that we should see 'the world, not as an aggregation of numberless things but as a place or transformational matrix within which those abstractions that we call objects or things have their fleeting, independent identities.' (*ibid.*) Kitaro Nishida, in his book *An Enquiry into the Good*, claims that our individuality is not central to our consciousness.

The sphere of consciousness is never limited to the individual person, for the individual is no more than a small system within consciousness. We usually regard as central the small system that takes bodily existence for its nucleus, but if we regard the great system of consciousness as central, then this great system is the

¹⁶ The Kyoto School, also known as the Nishida School, was the school of thought originated by Kitaro Nishida and followed by his students who succeeded from him and taught in Kyoto University. Among his disciples, Hajime Tanabe (1885-1962) and Keiji Nishitani (1900-1990) are known as the most direct descendents of Nishida's philosophy. The School represents Japan's first sustained and original contribution to Western philosophical thoughts which they did from eastern perspective. (Heisig, 2001)

self, and its development is the fulfilment of that self's will. (Nishida, 1921: 28)

This immediately makes us wonder what would happen to the diagram developed in the previous Chapter (Figure 14, page 61) in which the individual came first and inter-relations of such individuals (i.e. group) third. If the 'larger whole' or the 'great system' is considered the base of the self, then, it may well be possible to think that the first and the third exchange places. The Kyoto School view of one's selfness is very useful because it allows us to think of a possibility of different ways to see the individual and, as a result, develop further the triadic diagram.

So far everything seems to go very well. However, a negative aspect of this kind of holistic view due to its ethical connotation has to be notified. The fact that the formative years of this current of thinking coincided with the period of intense militarism in Japan brought criticisms against the thought of the Kyoto School. As Cooper puts it, '[the Kyoto School's] flirtation with national politics raises the question of the affinity of Kyoto philosophy with the ideology of the period.'¹⁷ The attacks were on their influence on the wartime holistic rhetoric and provocation of the fascist or nationalist ideology in Japan¹⁸. This negative impact of Kyoto School ideas on the wartime Japan and criticism of it has to be kept in mind. Yet, there is no doubt that their idea provides us with an alternative view on the individual, and it is very important that the theory certainly serves the purpose of this Chapter where we are trying to develop a definition of the term 'groupness'.

¹⁷ Cooper explains that all three Kyoto School thinkers, Nishida, Tanabe and Nishitani 'were flourishing during the fourteen years from the invasion of Manchuria to the end of the Pacific War, in a country whose increasingly militaristic and fascist ideology was encapsulated in the notorious Fundamentals of Our National Polity (1937), with its "Japanist" doctrine of a "great family nation" that "gives birth to individual human beings' (Cooper, 2003: 7).

¹⁸ 'The issue of the Kyoto School's political sympathies inevitably reminds one of 'the Heidegger controversy', where similar questions arise concerning the collision of fascist ideology of both a man and his philosophy.' (*ibid.*)

4. 0. 2. Diagram IV

In the previous version of the triadic diagram drawn in the conclusion in Chapter Three, which was achieved through the theory of the triadic relation developed by Charles Sanders Peirce (Figure 14, page 61), one's individuality is relational and involves the person's self, the realization of the other, and the self's relationships with society, environment, family etc. which I refer to as the group as a whole. The purpose of introducing the Kyoto School idea of 'selfness growing out of the greater whole', is to help us understand the contrasting view against the earlier assumption made in Chapter Three. What if the individual self does not come first? We will turn next to visually examine how the Kyoto School idea can reverse the more conventional idea of the individual suggested above.

When developing Figure 14, we decided that the first circle represented Firstness whose characteristic is vagueness and possibility and absolute nothingness in Zen, which talks about inexhaustible possibility. The concept of the larger whole sounds ambiguous. If we consider the relationship between Firstness and Thirdness representing the movement from the general to the specific, it seems to be appropriate to put the whole into the first spot owing to its vagueness and universality. It is now time to move on to some Japanese ideas that reverse this thinking. Nishida discusses the self as the specific manifestation of the great system. The individual self requires specific understanding or meaning to be a particular person. That involves the third person view, i.e. other people's involvement, in order to give it a context. This seems to suggest that this kind of interpretation of the individual matches the criterion of Thirdness. Moreover, Thirdness requires both Firstness and Secondness, thus for the individual to identify himself as the individual in a specific time and space.

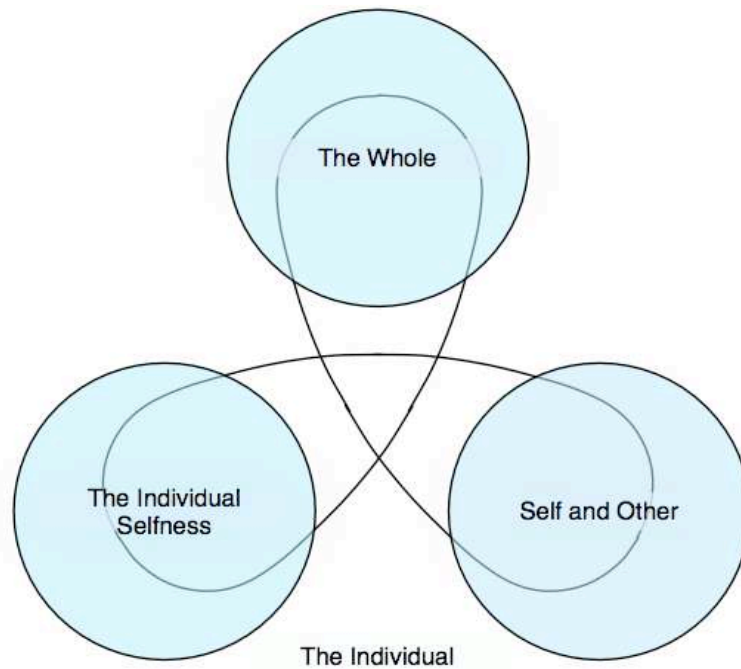


Figure 15: The individual coming out of the larger whole

By bringing in the concept of the larger whole from which the individual's selfness comes, it is now possible to reverse the positions of the three elements of the triadic diagram (Figure 15). I feel that the larger whole is what I want to call groupness. Yet, it is at the moment still an intuitive response to what we previously found out, although this is an intriguing and interesting point of departure for this Chapter. In order to make sure groupness is the right term to use we need to know more about it.

4. 1. Groupness

It is now understood that the Kyoto School philosophy, 'selfness grows out of the greater whole' gave me a hint that I might be able to discuss one's individuality the other way round, i.e. groupness coming first. I hope that we will find the answer to this question by the end of this Chapter, but my hypothesis, particularly from my experience of being part of a group, is that one's 'selfness' is very likely to grow out of groupness.

I first became conscious of my individuality through the awkwardness or difficulties, or a feeling of unfitness, that I have experienced during my study of fine art in a UK art school, where I constantly felt the need of being an individual. I shall come back to this point – the art school stress on a student's individuality – in Chapter Five. Although the confusion was probably caused because I am from group-oriented Japan, it was more importantly my membership of the artists' group that made me have the awkwardness. I strongly identify myself with the group and it is part of my individual identity. The Western notion that groups are merely collections of individual agents is counterintuitive to me. As an artist being involved in a group, I feel that my selfness or individuality as a person cannot be separated from the feeling of belonging to the 'greater whole', which in my case is the Ryu Group. The assumption I have reached from my own experience, being part of a group as an individual practitioner, is that the sense of individuality is intricately connected to its relationship with something larger than just the individual. This feeling of belonging is what I propose to call groupness. Why use 'groupness' as opposed to 'the greater whole'? I am inclined to use the word groupness, as it is in response to the relationship between my *group* experience and individuality I came to conclude that the group is deeply rooted within my individuality.

Another reason why I intend to use this term is in order to distinguish it from more common terms like groups, groupings, etc. It is not my interest to discuss the particular group and what they do, or to provide art historical significance of particular artists' groups, about the expectation of commitment or responsibility to a particular group either, although this can be part of group experiences for many people (including myself), nor the action of groupings, an intention of making or identifying a group from the whole. Instead, I am referring to a particular feeling (whether positive or negative) of being lost without the group. The suffix '-ness' adds to a word

the sense of being in a state or condition¹⁹. It is an abstraction: the condition of being in a group, not the actual fact of being in a group.

Above all, what I expect the term would do is to help us argue something beyond the contrast between individual and group in order to achieve a better understanding of what is the individual. The term group does not seem to be in frequent use to talk *about* the individual. What it is often referred to is as the *antonym* or *opposite* of the individual, and to be against or conforming to a group seems to be a significant factor in terms of one's identification as the individual. However, I do not see my individuality as being against my group membership. Therefore, it has been important for the thesis to arrive at a terminology which can express something more than the term 'group'. So, crucially, by saying 'groupness', I am not talking about specific groups. It is the experience and feelings of being part of the group and its influence on my individuality.

Through the following discussion of what the individual is, I am hoping to clarify three points: 1) explore the relationships between individual and group in the West and Japan; 2) establish clear definition(s) of the term groupness through the consideration of the individual-group relationships; and 3) consider the connotations of the term groupness in our investigation on the individual. This needs a lot of careful unfolding of ideas, such as individual and group which are very profound and broad issues themselves. The most important role of this Chapter is to achieve a good definition(s) of the term groupness through an investigation of the meaning of individual and group. In the later part of this Chapter we will start to discuss the individual-group relationship.

¹⁹ 'suffix: 1 denoting a state or condition. 2 something in a certain condition.' (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2006: 961)

4. 2. 0. Individual-group relationship

Now, we would like to delve into the journey to achieve a clearer definition of the term groupness. I am intending to do so by considering different levels of the relationship between individual and group. Again, this research is not an attempt to give an extensive account of these very intense and challenging socio-cultural phenomena like individual and group. It is not at all possible to exhaust these complicated and fundamental human conditions in just a few pages of this thesis. However, what this thesis needs to do and could do is to consider the relationship between the two in order to explore significance of the individual fine art practitioner. It is essential for us, at this point of the thesis, to know more about socio-cultural perceptions and attitudes towards the phenomenon of the individual, in order for us to have a debate about the topic.

4. 2. 1. Individual *and* Group

I use italicized '*and*' between individual and group for the title of this section. It is to indicate that in this section we would like to simply focus on the very basic ideas of what the words indicate. Here I would like to consider these terms with no reference to any historical, religious and social theories around individual and group here, just yet. What does it mean when one says something is individual? If I present you with a book, a rock, and a cloud, and ask you to tell me whether you think the entity is an individual, you may wonder whether I am trying to ridicule you. There is a single entity before you so that is an individual thing. How about us human beings? Each human being is a discrete individual entity, a countable physical presence, a thing, with a separate physical body that cannot be shared with anyone else, like other things existing on earth.

How about a group? Can we think that we know what a group is in this same sense? We usually accept that a group is seen as an aggregation of things. This is the very basic idea about being individual, and groups made up by the individual units or things. Can we identify it as a group if there is a mass of individual things? When one talks about ‘individual’ and ‘group’ as facts or phenomena, regardless of being human or non-human, the quality the individual possesses is its *singularity*. The individual is a discrete, separated single unit. Whereas, the most noticeable quality of the group is its *plurality*, i.e. a group consists of a sum of such individual items. If that is the case it may be possible to say that the world is a big group filled with discrete individual things, and the individuals are an integrated part of the group in the broadest possible sense. The opening passage of the introduction to Henry Laycock’s recent book illustrates this feeling of mass, or ‘thing-ness’, very well:

Engaging in the business of reflective, abstract thought, we nevertheless find ourselves initially most at home in contemplating the category of individual concrete bodies—individual chairs, tables, dogs, cats, snowflakes, ice cubes, jugs, flowers, trees, houses, stars, planets, bacteria, molecules, and so on—all seemingly distinguishable, discrete units, each countable as one, each one retaining its unique identity, processing some cohesive casual unity, persisting for some finite period of time, surviving certain kinds of change but not other kinds of change, interacting casually with other discrete units in a common space and time. (Laycock, 2006: 1)

From Laycock’s passage we can picture the image in which we are all different units in the world filled by such discrete items. The diagram below (Figure 16) is an attempt to illustrate what is described in the quotation.

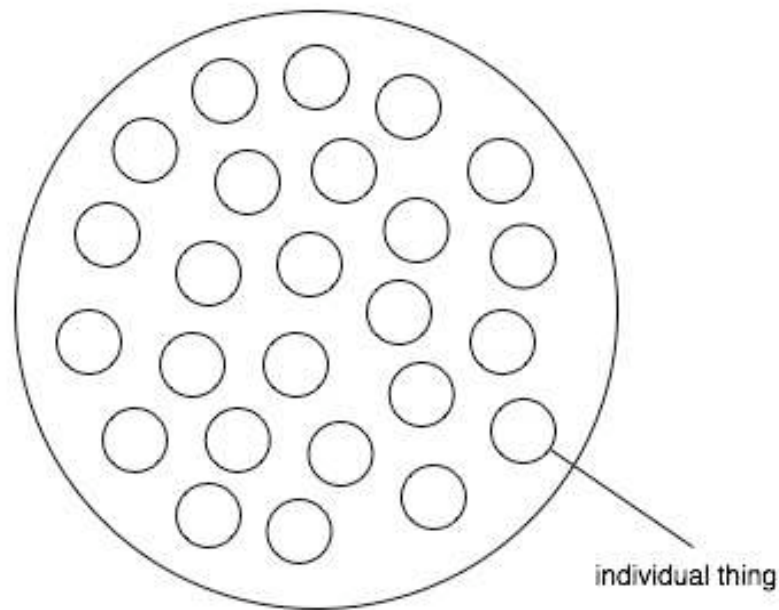


Figure 16: The world filled with individual things

In this view we human beings are separate things filling the world. Importantly, as the diagram presents to us, the value of this is not only as an explication of the individual, but the fact that the world is filled by countless discrete items and the items interact with others. This is a crucial point: a human being is an individual, yet they are an individual *amongst* others, for example in a society, a community or, more pertinently with regards to this thesis, some sort of a group. Here I try to show the natural fact. There is no power relation or conflict between them. Like it or not, if there is more than one thing these things can form a group, or others may recognize them as a group. We all intuitively know this is true, but not the whole truth.

The concept of individual and group is much more complicated if they are viewed from the perspective of social theory. We are human beings, not just a thing and that makes the matter in need of more exploration. We identify an individual thing as something standing out of the crowd, something particular, and groups are usually thought of as collections of individual agents that, for one reason or another, decide to work together.

That is, someone has to decide to call something or someone part of a group, or people have to get together and decide to call themselves a group. In the section below we will discuss priorities and power relationships between the two social phenomena.

4. 2. 2. Individual or Group

The title of this section has the alternating copula 'or' instead of the additive copula 'and' in the previous section. That is really the point of the discussion here. I would like now to turn to some historical and social theories (including religions) around the idea of individual and group. As we have seen above, the individual is a single and separated entity and such entities, by number, make up groups. Therefore, the most basic and significant distinction between them is that the individual is singular and the group plural. However, as soon as we consider using these terms in a social context, the way individual and group are viewed very much varies from one culture to another, and one time in history to another. They stop just being a matter of the number: singular or plural. The issue of priority between them immediately becomes relevant. In one culture the individual is regarded as the centre of any social activity. In the other, it is not the individual but the group that is given significance. In other words, it is the issue of prioritizing between the two states of being.

We shall begin with a historical view of the meaning of the word 'individual'. According to the cultural and literary critic Raymond Williams (1921-1988) the original meaning of the word individual was 'indivisible'. That changed in modern times. Williams also extensively examines the history of the meaning of individuals and societies in his book *Keywords*. In modern Europe "Individual" stresses a distinction from others; "indivisible" a necessary connection.' (Williams, 1976: 161) This conceivably is a largely accepted view about an individual person still

today. However, this has not always been the case in European history. Williams shows his astonishment at the huge leap in the meaning of the word individual calling it 'a record in language of an extraordinary social and political history.' (*ibid.*) We need more explanation of what the change was and what it was caused by. Williams in his other celebrated book, *the Long Revolution*, explains the extraordinary change as follows:

'Individual' meant 'inseparable', in medieval thinking, and its main use was in the context of theological argument about the nature of the Holy Trinity. The effort was to explain how a being could be thought of as existing by this nature as part of an indivisible whole. The logical problem extended to other fields of experience, and 'individual' became a term used to indicate a member of some group, kind, or species. [...] The separable entity is being defined by a word that has meant 'inseparable': an identity—a particular name—is conferred by a realisation of identity—the fact of common status. (Williams, 1961: 73)

The largely accepted modern meaning of the word individual is in fact a rather recent phenomenon in the long history of the word. It was not until the nineteenth century when 'the individual' became a noun to indicate a person. Originally, the individual was considered a part of a larger unit and it could not be separated from the unit it belonged to and was identified with the unit. This idea reminds us of the Kyoto School view of one's individuality and selfness emerging from the greater whole. However, the meaning changed completely in modern times—which led to a reversed priority. Williams continues:

The crucial history of the modern description is a change in emphasis which enabled us to think of 'the individual as a kind of absolute, without immediate reference, by the very structure of the term, to the group of which he is a member. And this change, so far as we can now trace it in the imperfectly recorded history of the word itself, seems to have taken place in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Slowly and with many ambiguities, since that time, we have learned to think of 'the individual in his own right', where previously to describe an individual was [...] [as] a [group] member, and to offer a particular

description of that group and of the relationships within it. (*ibid.*: 73-4)

Now the individual acquired autonomy and an independence from the group to which it belongs. In the course of history the individual and group were not only separated, but also increasingly considered as conflicting with each other. What is the role of others in modern Western culture, where each individual claims the right to be a single and free person, the group having no significance for the individual's value? Groups are even considered a possible obstacle for the individual's pursuit of its own interest or freedom, therefore, are not central to someone's value. The individual's freedom is threatened by the State, which is a macro-group, a very large-scale group.

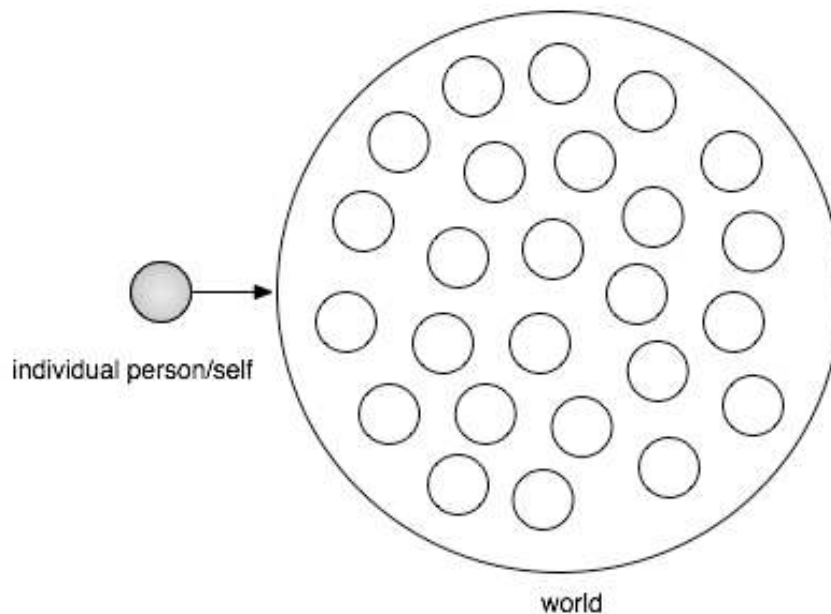


Figure 17: Western idea of the individual-group relations

If one's focus is on the pursuit of the rights of each free, individual person, William claims:

we are forced either to recognize that everybody is in this situation and has these rights, or in denying or remaining indifferent to them, to diminish the quality of our claim. This leads us to “turn other individuals into ‘the masses’”, from whom we must separate ourselves. (Williams, 1961: 96)

The diagram above (Figure 17) is my attempt to illustrate this idea. The history of the term in Europe is the very separation of the individual from the group and the focus on the singularity of the individual person. Interestingly, in his debate on the relationship between individuals and societies Williams uses different terms for different forms of group, e.g. the Church, community, society, the mass, become the counterpart of the individual as the meaning of the word individual develops. We would like to discuss this point later, but it is the most significant point in the development of the word individual that the individual person somehow became an observer of the world outside him/her self.

Indeed, the full explanation of the history of individuality in the West may require a social theorist of some sophistication. However, my intention up to this point has been to demonstrate the modern shift as a clear contrast between individual and group. First, we saw a view that an aggregation of discrete individuals makes up the world as a big group. Although the two may be distinct in terms of the number, there was no priority recognized in this view. Then, the individual-group relationship has increasingly become *either-or*. In the past group (community) claimed priority over the individual. That is, one’s identity being inseparable from the group, one had essentially no sense of individuality. This changed completely in modern times when the dominance has been given to the individual. We will discuss more of the individual’s dominance in the modern time later, but before doing so it may be important to focus our attention on some cultural differences in the perception of individual-group relations.

4. 3. Different perceptions of the individual in the West and East

In the preceding sections we quickly examined, first, the basic meaning of the individual and group, and then, the relationships between the two in social context and their development in European history. The aim of this section is to further our understanding of the idea of the individual by exploring different meanings of the relationships between individual and group in different cultures.

According to Alan Macfarlane, the British anthropologist who specializes in British individualism and has also worked in Japan, many social scientists typically assert that ‘two major types of social/economic/political/religious structure’ (Macfarlane, 1979: 17) are the individual and the group: 1) individual-based structure where the individual is the centre of focus, and 2) group-based structure where the group is prioritized to the individual. Also, in 1) groups, such as society, more specifically the State or communities, are thought to be restrictive and therefore something to protect the individual’s freedom *from*; but in 2), groups, e.g. families, communities, associations, etc. are considered supportive and enabling for the individual. The claims of two major social structures suggest the presence of a priority between individual and group in those two social types, i.e. individual comes first or group first. In this way of thinking the individual and the group are considered two extreme opposites. Accordingly, in those societies groups are perceived very differently in their relation to the individual; they are either negative or positive for the individual.

Simply stated, the example of the former society (the individual right has a priority over the group and is free from it.) is the West, and that of the latter (the group has the priority and is supportive) is the East. As far as the two societies concerned in this thesis, the UK and Japan, they are two extreme examples of the two kinds of society: Japan is regarded as the ‘least individualistic civilization in the world’ (Macfarlane, 2007: 77) and

England is considered the birthplace of individualism (Macfarlane, 1978). The architect and urban planner, Günter Nitschke's comparison between Japanese and Western societies, in his book investigating the imperial, religious and domestic architecture of Japan, enhances that. As he puts it, the West is the 'society of self-assertion, of eternal conflict of individual interests', and the Japanese society is 'of self-abnegation and harmony, of complete identity with the group, of the common purpose' (Nitschke, 1993: 58). Nitschke further argues:

In the Japanese language, and thus in society, a person is conceived of as a flexible and easily likable *dividuum*, that is, as a split from and belonging to a larger whole. Everyone is educated to shake off the delusion of a separate individual ego, and to express supra-individual values. What characterises a person as human is that one is always together with other humans. In Japanese history, the only physical escape from the community was through withdrawal into the mountains, and in such case a person was referred to as *sen-nin* (仙人), 'hermit', a word of other-worldly nuance. There never has been a Japanese word for 'privacy'.

In contrast the Western mind has tended to envisage the human being as a perfect and self-contained *individuum* (that is, indivisible whole) who should be educated to distinguish oneself from everyone else. We are encouraged to view the self as real, to discipline it and to express highly individual values. The desire to produce individual genius, a 'superman', has haunted all of Western history. (*ibid.*: 57)

In the West one identifies oneself as an independent and autonomous individual which is the basis of everyday life and thinking processes. Western culture is based on the individual. On the other hand, many consider Japanese society as 'group-minded' (Doi, 1973), 'groupist' or 'group-centred' (Odin, 1996), etc. And for many Japanese people, including myself, conforming to others is indeed a great virtue. According to Macfarlane (2007), the Japanese particularly, compared to other societies in the East, have an acutely strong sense of being a minute and insignificant part of the environment they are situated in. In Japan one's individuality is apparently the very basis of everyday life as largely

accepted in their Western counterpart. Although nowadays the Japanese frequently use the word in a form of a Japanese translation *kojin* (個人, literally item-person), it was created to express an imported Western notion. 'The word for person/people, *hito* (人), has always been familiar to Japanese, however it does not have the 'isolating nuance' of the Western 'individual' but refers simply to a discrete body'. (Nitschke, 1993: 57) Nonetheless, the fact that Japanese traditionally had no word to express what we typically call 'individual' is a good indication that the Japanese sense of individuality should be somewhat different from that of the West.

If so it will be interesting to see what will happen to the diagram of Laycock's idea (Figure 16, page 72). Laycock's image is applicable also to Japanese society in so far as it is read as an image of the world filled with a lot of things. But their centre of attention is on the whole environment, not the separate individuals. The description by Laycock fits with this image of discrete and countable individuals filling up a certain space, but the similarity ends there. One is not satisfied with the fact that one is an individual but one wants to be an individual. In the mindset of such a person; being a part of a group has a negative connotation, for this can be seen as a threat to the individual's freedom. If the group is so powerful, one cannot express one's self freely (Figure 18).

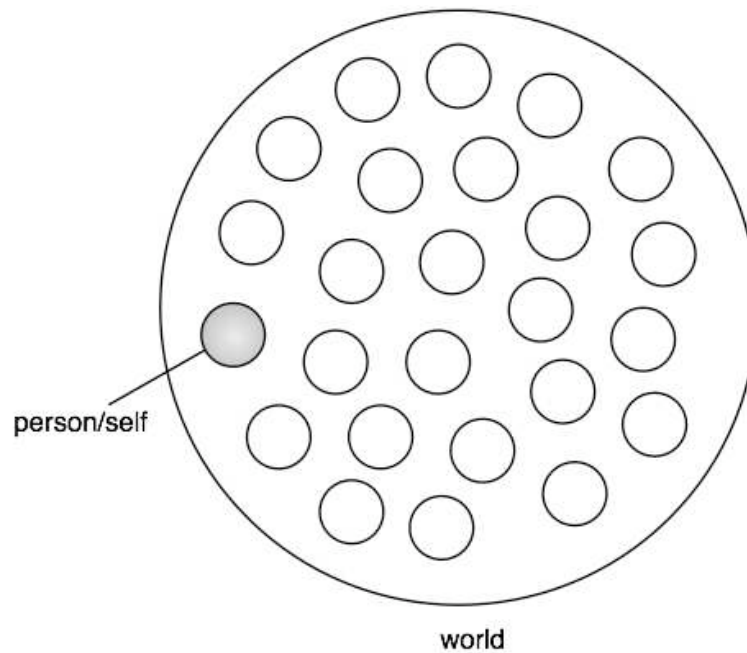


Figure 18: Japanese view of the individual

It has been clear that the two cultures are contrasting, or even they seem to be on the opposite poles. Here, one may wonder where the differences come from. It seems that the most commonly accepted basis of any cultural differences between the West and East parallels precisely that of Christianity and Buddhism (Macfarlane, 1992; Nakamura, 1994; Kimura, 2005; and Abe, 1997). For example, the Japanese lack of the sense of individual, Macfarlane suggests, is due to the ‘absence of a dominant monotheistic religion and of a belief in an individual soul to relate to one God’ (Macfarlane, 2007: 77).²⁰ Whereas, basically, Christianity, or the Judeo-Christian tradition, has its basis in a direct and vertical relationship between God and one’s self (Kimura, 2005). Realizing the importance of the religions’ impact on our culture and society it is clear that the comparison could give us more insight into the fundamental differences between the West and East. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to go further into the religious issues.

²⁰ The Japanese forms of Buddhism, particularly, deny the existence of the individual soul. (Macfarlane, 2007: 77)

The focus on the historical and cultural accounts of the concept of the individual (and its relationship with groups) in this section has informed us how different their ideas of the individual are between the West and Japan: in the former the individual person is the observer of the world and in the latter they are integrated part of it. This discussion has been necessary in order for us to gain a grasp of where my practice as an individual comes from and is now situated in. We are now reminded that Western society is considered individualistic and the Eastern or Japanese society non-individualistic and group-minded and why they are so. The cultural differences are, of course, an intriguing matter to discuss, but I think we have arrived at something more than that now.

After our discussions of a difference between group-oriented and individually oriented societies, it may be possible to imagine that in such societies there are inevitably different ideas about the individual person is at work. Japan is not individualistic in the Western way, i.e. pushing one's individuality against group's interests. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the Japanese do not have any sense of being individual. One thing we have found out in the last few sections is that the meaning of the individual we know is not necessarily something concrete. What this seems to suggest is that it is not the contrast between individual and group, but the different kinds of individuality we should have in our mind now in order to understand the distinction between the West and Japan: individuality based on the single individual self, or based on a group.

The Japanese idea of the individual based on group may sound like the individual based on the greater whole. And it may be not only the Japanese who understand this. For example, the presence of concepts such as 'esprit de corps'²¹ suggests that strong group identity can be

²¹ It is defined as 'a feeling of pride and mutual loyalty uniting the members of a group' (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2006: 487).

commonly understood. Yet, when one says that the individual is based on group (or society or community), the implication perhaps is that the individual is a part to the group in the sense that they are within group. For me, it is not sufficient to be applied to our exploration of the meaning of the term groupness. We should go beyond the difference between the two social phenomena, individual and group or cultural differences related to those.

4. 4. 0. Recent global problem of the perception of the individual

Now I would like to move onto a more recent and significant development of the concept of the individual. It may be considered rather misleading to refer to modernity as recent, but the intention is that I will discuss here the period span between modernity and the present time. This period provided an enormous change to the meanings of the concept. Cultural critics have been discussing the sources of revolutionary change for nearly two centuries. One important theme of these discussions has been the relation between tradition and modernity. In short, modernized society destroyed community and gave birth to the modern individuality (Macfarlane, 1979). The breakdown of traditional communities was the negative consequence of changing technology and economic patterns; but the positive consequence was the freeing of individuals from the narrow limitations of tradition. Modernity accelerated the rise of all-powerful sovereigns, such as Napoleon or in the 20th century, dictators such as Hitler and Stalin. The relevance of this to the argument of this thesis is not only that modernity has been seen as a dire threat to the traditional sense of community, the established forms of group identity, but also that its influence has been beyond the geographical or historical dissimilarities of societies.

4. 4. 1. Modernity: the shift towards individuality

It is largely accepted that the change to the individual-centred society in the West happened at the same time as the Modernist movement (Williams, 1961 and 1976; Nishio, 1969; Macfarlane, 1978, 1979 and 1992; Wheeler, 2006; and Josipovici, 2007). It has been argued with no definite conclusion as to when the Modernist movement actually happened and what triggered it, and it is not my aim to make the date clear here. Rather, I should emphasize that it is possible, at least, to say that the impact modernity had on the development of the idea of the all-powerful, independent, autonomous individual was so significant and comprehensive, irrespective of the cultural or geographical differences which have been analyzed above. The role of this section is to discuss what modernity did to our society. The individual-group issues examined here are not likely to maintain their traditional profiles in such circumstances.

In the cultural history of the West, the twentieth century has seen far-reaching changes, identified from the beginning as a conflict between tradition and modernity. Even before that, the nineteenth century had brought changes in economic processes – industrialisation and urbanization – that added up to revolutionary change. Wheeler claims that ‘the loss of a sense of community is a constant theme in modernity; but while actual communities can be oppressive as well as supportive, it seems to me that what is mourned as lost is simply the cultural acknowledgement of the fact of human society itself’ (Wheeler, 2006: 132). The point seems to be that the idea of the individual’s *direct* communication with the God (Macfarlane, 1978) of Protestantism (i.e. the individual was no longer subject to the priestly hierarchy or indeed the social hierarchy) led to the concepts of individual private property, and to the political and legal liberty of the individual.

I find the literature of 'modernity' and 'Modernism' dauntingly vast. I have found it helpful to think of modernity as the name of a highly diffused range of changes in society, in technology, in economics, and in ideas which began in the late 18th century and have gone on developing ever since. Modernism is the name of a conscious, critical movement in culture and the field of ideas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century which promulgates modernity as a universal value. Efforts to grasp the essence of the idea, which began with the assumption that Modernism was a cultural movement in northern Europe deriving from Protestantism, led to a realization that its driving force emerged in political economy in the eighteenth century. It was in this context that the concept of 'liberalism' crystallised as a political idea. In brief, this notion was based on the positive appreciation of competition between individuals – the central point of Adam Smith's philosophy in his book *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776. Smith argued that competition between individuals had positive social and economic effects. The word 'liberal' came to be used during the French revolution to describe the sort of society where Smith's ideas operated. From there the word entered the political and philosophical vocabulary of all Western nations. The political idea of a *free market* is the most common way to evoke this idea today. It acquired a fresh resonance in the 1980s under the name of 'Thatcherism' (Lukes, 1973). We should perhaps mention in passing that the development of socialism in the nineteenth century was an attempt to challenge the ideas of individualism, and its political form of anarchism, etc. Might it be said that Karl Marx and the whole writing tradition of socialism was perhaps a quarrelsome footnote to Adam Smith?

The recent history of individualism took the form of a movement from communities to individuals. Increasingly, the sense of belonging to any group has become some sort of obstacle to the individual. Of course, the individual has always been the basis of every aspect of European culture (Nishio, 1969), and yet it has been pushed to its limit. The idealism of the

liberal individual was so far pushed, this new generation of individualists accepted that 'the war of all against all would result in harmony, balance and maximum happiness', 'rather than postulate a need for an all-powerful sovereign (Christianity)'. (Kingdom, 1992: 12) As a result, one may argue that the West has always been individualistic and modernity is not the cause of this atomized individual.

The power of modernity being so strong and decisive, Japan did not escape its influence. The rapid industrialization and urbanization in the West were aspects of modernity which attracted the Japanese at the time. For the Japanese modernity was so idealized because being modernized meant a stronger and richer country²² (Nishio, 1969). Yet, it can be imagined that they did not quite realize the implication of such a movement: with its heavy emphasis on the liberal individual. As already discussed above, the Japanese have no sense of the Western-style individual. Here one would naturally question: what would happen when Japan went through the change towards the modern Western individualism without the same background? The result was confusion in the non-individualistic society.

After all those years since the influence of modernity reached Japan, there is still some confusion and even conflicts, in the air, about the nature of the individual in Japanese group-oriented and conformist society and culture. Young people are expected to develop their own individuality, something special to themselves, in a still largely conformist oriented society. The recent BBC Four programme on Japan²³ provided an interesting insight in

²² For example, in 1850 the Japanese army was armed with swords and spears. By 1900 there had been such root and branch modernization on European models that they could declare war on China in 1895 – and win. Ten years later Japan declared war on Russia – and won again. This was the first time in recorded history that a non-European power had defeated a European power.

²³ *Great Railway Journeys - Tokyo to Kagoshima* was broadcast on 21 Mar 2009 as part of BBC Four's *Japan season*. In the programme the BBC foreign correspondent travels through Japan on the bullet train and discovers different lives in the country.

relation to my research. Fergal Kean (2009), the presenter, concluded the programme by saying that the social instability, due to the economic crisis, has forced the Japanese to rethink the old system of group, and that as it has been proved not to be relied on as much as in the past, the option Japanese society is left with is to change from group to individual. He may be right, but then this remark makes me wonder in what way it would be possible for everyone to become individual? Can they suddenly be individual in the Western sense?

Summing up, one thing we can say for sure is that modernity, the age of progress, brought to our society the ideal of the sovereign individual irrespective of where in the world we are, or whether we are individual or group-oriented. Each Individual began pursuing their own prosperity and, a larger group of such self-centred individuals, they would develop the world a better place. In this kind of thinking, groups are considered secondary to the individual's rights (the doctrine of the individual for the individual's sake) the term groupness (the idea that the individuals are based on the greater whole) has no room in people's consideration. I find this extreme individualist view rather alarming both for our society and for the individual's wellbeing and prosperity. Moreover, if this is the individual I am expected to be as an art practitioner, it is very difficult for me to sympathize with this kind of view. In Chapter Three, through an analysis of Eastern and Western philosophies, we reached a conclusion: in the triadic diagram it is possible to see one's individuality as being essentially relational; that is a person's identity is created in the whole relationship of their self with the whole of the environment, including other people. If one solely believes in the extreme form of individualism, it is not possible to adopt such a view.

Indeed, recently, many see the limits of the view developed through modern culture which 'tolerates, and even encourages, the idea that selfishness, raw competition and self-advancement are natural, even

laudable' (Macintyre, 2009: 33). The 'age of reduction', as Wheeler describes, has been so dominant a feature of our society for the last two centuries. However, in the past decades there have been growing concerns over such dominance. Wheeler claims that 'the philosophy and ideology of neo-liberal individualism, as understood and promoted from the 1970s onwards, [is] profoundly and damagingly mistaken.' (Wheeler, 2006: 26) In many different areas of study it has begun to be realized that in order to really understand a human being, the whole system on which the individual is based has to be understood. This will encourage us to move to the 'age of emergence' (*ibid.*). This inspires the writer to move on to something beyond just cultural differences discussed above. Let us look at this shift carefully in the following sections.

4. 4. 2. Present and future ideas of individuality

[...] while each and every one of us is manifestly an individual, whose life and wellbeing matters, humans and their wellbeing are not most fully understood unless the fundamentally social nature of human existence is properly taken into account. This – our fundamental society – is lived in our inner, as well as outer, world; and it is emotional as well as physical; and all this – our essential social being – is written on our bodies in terms of flourishing or (its opposite) illness. (Wheeler, 2006: 12)

Very simply put, Wheeler claims that human beings are fundamentally 'social creatures' (*ibid.*: 18), and the individual will be understood better through the consideration of human society as a whole rather than just as an isolated individual. Wheeler bases this holistic understanding of the individual on the emerging area of study in science called biosemiotics²⁴

²⁴ Biosemiotics developed from the confluence over time of three main sources. In a special 1984 issue of the journal *Semiotica* edited by [Thomas A.] Sebeok, the latter describes the development of biosemiotics as stemming from Charles Sanders Peirce; from the biology of Jakob von Uexküll as formulated in von Uexküll's *Bedeutungslehre*

which is also known as complexity or system theory in science (Hoffmeyer, 2004 and Wheeler, 2006). 'Biosemiotics (*bios* = *life* and *semion* = *sign*) is an interdisciplinary science that studies communication and signification in living systems' (Sharov, 1998). The significance of Wheeler's argument is that she adapts biosemiotics to human society. Crucially, Wheeler's biosemiotic view of human beings is not simply a recurrence of the old-style community-based society, i.e. faith and reliance in the group. Like Charles Sanders Peirce, it is against the old and obstinate influence of Cartesian dualism in Western society and our perception of the individual.

Modernity, particularly with regard to its association with the globalized individual-centred attitude, seems to be considered a negative part of the development of human society. The atomised individual with absolute right, led by the Modernist movement and now unpopular Cartesian liberal philosophy, caused communities to weaken. Takeshi Yoro (2003), the ex-professor at Tokyo University and an eminent anatomist, presents a similar view. Yoro argues that it is a mistake to regard one's mind as something permanent and, thus, a trustworthy base of one's individual thinking. He argues that the modernized society increased the amount of information which we are able to obtain and process at an inconceivable speed thanks to the development of technology. The information-driven society has created the belief in the unchangeable self, Yoro claims. In such a society human beings are considered to be accumulations of information like computers. In other words, we are a computer and the computer is unchangeable but information is changeable. On the contrary: one's physical body, including the brain, changes constantly, but minds require commonality to understand each other. The human being is a system working in harmony, not an accumulation of information.

(*The Theory of Meaning*) (1940); and from his own development of zoosemiotics, the study of animal's use of semiosis.' (Wheeler, 2006: 120)

What system/complex theory explains is that, according to Wheeler (2006), the individual self is an emergent phenomenon; that is, any single entity (a sign) could not be wholly understood unless the whole environment of signs (the semiosphere) is considered. This may sound as though the individual is restricted by the society as a whole and has no freedom whatsoever. I do not mean to dismiss the importance of the individual's rights or freedom, and neither do the emergent theories. It is the individual who owns their body and actions, but the truth is not thinkable without the situation it is based on. Wheeler emphasize this point:

The account of human freedom offered in this book does not rest on the existential freedom imagined in liberal philosophy, however, but upon the complex systems of what Jasper Hoffmeyer calls 'semiotic freedom' – a biosemiotic account of freedom as evolutionary development. This is a freedom which is always constrained by grammar and discourse, and the rules which are part of human social and cultural making, but which is also always open to the 'rule-breaking' evolutionary emergence of the newer grammars and newer languages in which we recognise human creativity. (Wheeler, 2006: 19)

Biosemiotics is a relatively new area of study developed in the past fifty years or so, and there will be more researches to be done in the future. However, it is not at all a new idea in the East, as we have seen earlier. Wheeler is certain that 'complexity thinking' has long existed in Eastern philosophy, particularly in the form of Buddhist philosophy which understands 'the inter-relatedness and co-independent co-arising of all life' (*ibid.*: 97). Biosemiotics and System Theory seem to share its ideas with the Kyoto School which asserts that selfness springs out of 'the greater whole' which we initially decided to call 'groupness' in the beginning of this Chapter. Both of them suggest that the idea that there is a fixed self is false. The self is considered a non-predetermined 'process' or 'path', 'or, in other words, the network or web of relationships [...] in which they are

enmeshed' (*ibid.*: 100). An individual is seen as 'any point on that path' but 'the path has a specific history' (*ibid.*) which makes the individual different from any other individuals.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explain further what system/complex theory or biosemiotics are, but it is important that the people from both sides of the world have begun to realise the importance in holistic rethinking of the concept of the individual against a focus on individuality. Most importantly, Wheeler's account of biosemiotics and complexity science (or System Theory) in human society and creativity, combined with the Kyoto School philosophy, has helped me to have confidence in developing the idea of 'groupness'. Only when this kind of all-inclusive view is in place, can one use the concept groupness.

Coming back to the passage from Wheeler's *The Whole Creature* quoted at the beginning of this section: 'This – our fundamental society – is lived in our inner, as well as outer, world', it is easily conceivable that the outer society as a group (in this case society, a very large social group). We all live in our society which provides rules, tradition, etc, i.e. context for the individual. It is more difficult to imagine a society or group inside us. However, I am inclined to think that this 'inner society' *is* groupness as opposed to group i.e. the society outside us. This reminds me of the question put in the Introduction (Chapter One). It arose in a conversation with a member of staff who asked me whether there is any presence of the Ryu Group at Northumbria University even with only one member remaining (see page 13). The Group, from the outsider's point of view, is not as strongly present with one member as it is with many members. But, as far as the member is concerned, one person can claim to be the group.

The discussion so far has given us a grasp of what groupness means. When one claims the greater whole to be the individual's base (or Firstness), this communicates something very close to what I want to

express with the term groupness. However, what I have discovered through our investigation of the individual-group relationship is that we need a term which can entail my group background as part of my individuality. In the following section, a conclusion to this Chapter, I would like to discuss what the term could do to talk about the individual, using the triadic diagram.

4. 5. Diagram V: Singularity- and groupness- oriented individuals

We investigated the different perceptions of the individual in the individualistic West and group-minded Japan: the singularity-oriented individual and group-based individual. This discussion certainly helped us move a step forward in getting a glimpse of the potential for developing a concept of different kinds of individuality from our earlier presumption of the view of the individual which consists of the self as Firstness, self-other relation Secondness, and group mediating the other two as Thirdness (as seen in Figure 14, page 61). However, the result was not entirely satisfactory, because it seemed to be just a matter of cultural differences. It felt as though there were some elements missing for the term 'groupness' to play a role in describing the individual person. In order to go a step further from the cultural comparison, we need a terminology that will recognise the group not as a plurality, but as a higher form of singularity.

The terminology, I propose, is groupness. Returning to the beginning of this Chapter, the idea of 'groupness' was introduced. This is my own concept derived from Kyoto School philosophy: One's individuality or selfness springs out of the greater whole. Of course, in order to make a full use of any unfamiliar term, good definition(s) have to be identified for it, so we have spent the Chapter to find out the definitions. Our initial assumption was to call this 'greater whole' groupness. However, I was cautious in settling it that way at that time, because it seemed most

important to make clear what the term might imply, and to understand individuality based on its relationship with group which I wanted to use the term to help us see in a different light. Groupness (a combination between 'group' and the suffix '-ness') was an attempt to express a feeling of belonging to something bigger than the single individual.

We then looked into the fact that in modern society individual and group were seen as two extreme opposites. In the course of our discussion above, it emerged that the straightforward division between individual and group does not simply allow the groupness to be part of the individual. In so far as we saw only the individual-group dichotomy, the groupness idea hardly found its place. What we speculate the term groupness should express is that this is not simply the opposite of the individual, as the word 'group' (which the term originated from) is considered to be. Groupness is something intermediate between the supposedly distant and conflicting ideas. Furthermore, Wendy Wheeler's comparison between 'inner' and 'outer' society gave the term the sense that this is something come from within, not something we want to work toward. By using the term, it has become possible to discuss different kinds of individuality from a slightly different angle than the simple discussion of cultural differences.

In this final part of Chapter Four, I would like to develop a set of triadic diagrams describing the different kinds of individuality, and in order to do so, the term groupness is the keyword. Now the contrast has become one between individuality based on a single self (selfness), and individuality based on groupness. It may be right to think that the kind of individuality that emerges from groupness has a character distinct from the kind of individuality that is entirely insular in origin (Figures 19 and 20). Both the groupness-based individual and the selfness-based individual deal with a single person. The individual self can have its foundation (Firstness) in their singularity or groupness. In the single self's case, Firstness is the singular self (pure state of individuality), and Thirdness group (giving a

context or understanding to the individuality). Whereas in the case of groupness-based individuality, Firstness is groupness and the individual Thirdness. The individual person is an agreement within society, therefore, it is not the purest state of the person.

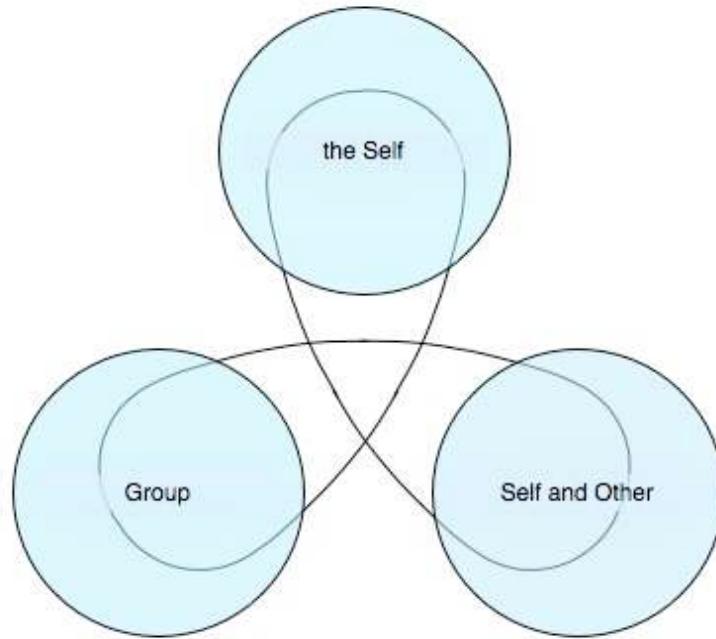


Figure 19: Singularity-based individual

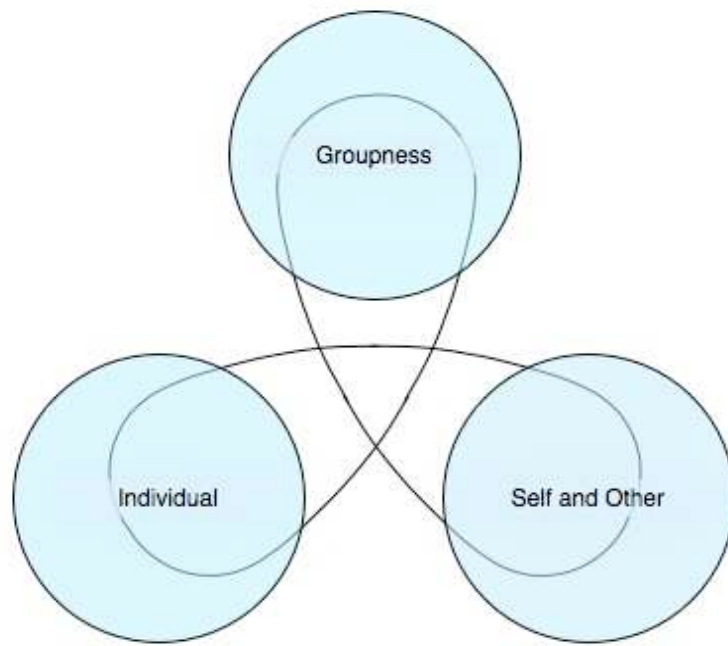


Figure 20: Groupness-based individual

The most important outcome of this Chapter is that we have come to see an alternative view of one's individuality: the groupness-based individual. Now we should be equipped for the further discussion of individuality in the following Chapter. This time our focus will be on finding the meaning of the creative individual, particularly in the area of visual art.

Chapter Five: Individuality and group in fine art practice

5. 0. Artists' groups and their impact on the creative individual

Moving on from our investigation on the development of individuality and its relations with groups in a general sense, this Chapter attempts to explore the meaning of the creative individual, the individual art practitioner. Particularly, we will discuss the role of artist groups in terms of their influence on the creativity of their individual members. This issue is perhaps a lot to do with how culturally different it is to be an individual person in the West and Japan discussed above. However, my involvement with a group has definitely made it more significant an issue for me.

I first became aware of my interest in the issue of individuality in creative practice through my art school experiences in two different countries, and later through my involvement in an artists' group. How does this figure in the context of groupness-individuality relationship? My training as a visual art practitioner and researcher has been taking place in extremely contradictory circumstances: Firstly, I am Japanese studying in England, and secondly, I am an individual fine art practitioner working also as a member of an artists' group. The former is a geographical and cultural displacement, the latter a question about the nature of creative practice.

As a doctoral researcher in a British school of fine art, I have had to navigate my way around a common perception that the West is individualistic and the East conformist. I sometimes, if not constantly, feel I do not 'fit', although the gap is opened to a lot of possibilities. On top of that, as a visual art practitioner and a member of an artists' group, I have experienced a seemingly profound gap between the individualistic nature of visual art practice and my group-minded upbringing and group-based activities. Both of the contradictory situations I have been through are

based on my personal struggle to find a meaning in being an individual in visual art practice.

The first situation is primarily related to the tension between individualistic British society and group-minded Japanese society, which we looked into in the preceding Chapter. Despite the fact that the cultivation of the individual student's creative potential is one of the most important purposes for art school education both in Britain and Japan, it is difficult to imagine, for me particularly after looking at the different ideas around the individual in the two cultures, that the perceptions of the individual artist are exactly the same in a British modern art school setting where the concept of being an individual is widely prevalent and in a Japanese art school where individuality is a fairly new idea. The Japanese people are educated to suppress their individuality (which is considered as self-regard) from a young age. It is not easy to ignore the affect of this long-term education on the art practitioner.

The second situation is more pressing and more problematic for me. The difficulty of the situation is due to the fact that my practice involves both individual and group oriented activities, i.e. my practice of producing artworks and my membership of the Ryu Art Group. My dilemma in being involved with the Group and being trained and undertaking research in Northumbria University is that the concept of group easily clashes with the individual nature of visual art practice. I have constantly felt a conflict between my identity as a member of the Ryu Art Group and the demand to be an independent individual practitioner, and a gap between different processes of developing oneself into a creative individual. If individuality is the extreme opposite of the group, my individuality is in danger of being conflicted with my group membership. My gut feeling is that there must be something intermediate in this seemingly impossible situation, because however deeply my practice is imbedded in the Ryu Group, it does not prevent me producing my own work.

From these situations two core questions seem to arise: 1) What is the meaning of being individual to the visual art practitioner?; and 2) would the meaning change depending on the location of one's practice: artists working alone and those working in an artist group?

5. 1. 0. Individuality in creative practice

When one talks about 'individuality in creative practice', what does one want to suggest? In this section we shall look at the relationship between the individual practitioner and their creativity. There seems to be a conventional way to see creative acts in the following manner:

[...] truly creative acts involve extraordinary individuals carrying out extraordinary thought process. These individuals are called geniuses, and the psychological characteristics they possess – cognitive and personality characteristics – make up what is called genius. (Weisberg, 1988: 148)

This is just an example of such a view. It is possible to say that, like any other human agent, the creative individual is a single and separate person who happens to practice in a creative area, such as visual art. However, the term individual seems to mean more than that, something more fundamental when used in describing the creative person. In seeking to discuss the individuality of the creative practitioner, I would like to start the following sections by investigating the image of the creative individual to help us clarify what kind of issue we are looking at when the term individual comes to be used in a creative realm.

Because of the nature of creative process where the individual experiences (experimenting, observing, etc.) and creates a work of art based on that experience using their skills and knowledge, and also because of the nature of one's experience (which is one's own property

and no one else can completely share it), it seems most natural to think that the act of creating artwork is individually based. Richard Hickman, Reader in Art Education at Cambridge University, underwent a series of interviews with established artists and school students about their attitude towards art-making. The result of Hickman's interviews shows that they think art-making processes are associated with 'individuality – self-esteem, identity, and self-confidence' (Hickman, 2005: 108). Art-making is considered enabling, for individuals 'learn in a meaningful and powerful way by facilitating all kinds of learning styles including doing, watching, thinking and feeling.' (*ibid.*: 101-102)

Moreover, the artist, or the visual art practitioner, is expected to be a highly independent, uncompromising and strong individual as the art historian John Jeffries Martin, briefly mentioned in the introduction, writes about the view of an artist as 'a strong wilful individual [who places] value on the will and on agency, on expressiveness, prudence and creativity and to have done so self-consciously. Inevitably we feel that we recognize such individuals (of robust, three-dimensional representations in the paintings and sculptures of our major museums and galleries) as autonomous, self-contained, psychologically complex persons like ourselves' (Martin, 2004: 3-5).

However, these traits of the creative person are not always perceived positively. Being a visual art practitioner myself, from my own experience, it is not always such a hyped-up and highly motivated affair to create artworks. The literary critic Gabriel Josipovici, in describing Modernism's influence on art and literature, portrays the artist as being in a constant 'pain, anxiety and despair' to create something significant or worthy. (Josipovici, 2007: 14) A similar view of the creative person was expressed by Richard Hickman: '[o]ne potent myth of Modernism is the personification of the artist as transgressor and outsider; many perhaps even most, Western artists are not generally known for their socially

responsible behaviour.’ (Hickman, 2005: 104) Here, the artist is depicted as a rather solitary and eccentric, or even masochistic person who is concerned with nothing but his own creation, alone in his studio, waiting for the inspiration to strike him like a thunderclap to give birth to something new.

Positive or not, these probably are still the relevant and predominant perceptions of the artist in the present day. A paragraph on one of the explanatory display boards in a recent exhibition *Cntrl.Alt.Shift* (13 March - 26 April 2009) at the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead is a good example. It gives a quote from one of the artists in the exhibition Graham Hudson:

[a]n artist's responsibility is to be independent, to question everything, and not to be afraid to upset public, patrons or peers. The guiding principle of the avant-garde was one of radical enquiry, and that is art history's best lesson to young artists. (*Graham Hudson, 2009*)

These are portrayals of the artist as an individual with a strong will to create something new, and as a challenger to the existing rules and values. Also, reading books on modern British art (e.g. Sakurai 2004), we will find all these names of individual artists one after another. In an extreme case, we know their names even when we have never seen their artworks in real life or in print. Those words associated with the creative individual, e.g. imagination, expression and creation, are so much used in the art world and, as a result, in art education. These virtues of the artist or creative person seem to be considered as belonging solely to the individual. It is as if only uncompromising individuals can be artists. All this may seem to be an overly romantic view which does not reflect the reality of creativity in all human personalities, whether or not they claim to be artists. However, another part of me cannot deny that these are probably the very virtues that the art audience wants to find in artworks. To sum up, from professional art practitioners to students learning art, and from critics

and historians, art and creative practice is so strongly associated with individuals and their independence and being individual is a significant part of the practitioner's identity.

5. 1. 1. Development of the concept of creativity

As we have seen in the quote from Weisberg's essay in the previous section, in recent history, at least, being individual has been considered as the important trait of the creative person. But before continuing our discussion on the relationship between creativity and the individual, it may be necessary to consider what creativity itself means. As Raymond Williams (1976) writes, creativity is itself, like individuality examined above, an extremely complex and demanding concept of which meanings have kept changing over time. The concept alone perhaps requires a thesis, and it is, of course, not the scope of this thesis to discuss in detail the deep and complicated realm of the concept. What I would like to focus on in this thesis, above all, is to consider the term's association with the individual practitioner. Still, it is probably important for us to know, even briefly, what creativity means in order to proceed our discussion of creativity for the artist.

Let the investigation commence with the analysis of Williams' description of the development of the concept in his *Keywords*, as this seems to be very useful for us to quickly get the grasp of how the concept has been developed to acquire the present meaning. He briefly but precisely explains the history of the word (Williams, 1976: 82-84). According to his descriptions, in the beginning the use of the term in English had a strong religious connotation: God as the ultimate *creator* and human beings are the *creatures* who were *created* by God the creator, i.e. it is transcendent of human capacity. It was not 'until the intellectual transformations inaugurated by humanist thinkers during the Renaissance', in the sixteenth

century that the secular connotations prevailed over the hindering power of the theological context. The next major development was 'conscious and the conventional association of creative with art and thought', which happen alongside the development of the concept of art in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This brought the distinction between an artisan and an artist: the former 'skilled' person and the latter '*creative* and *imaginative*' (*ibid*: 41)²⁵. In the late twentieth century, as the word 'creative' became secular and its association between art and creativity grew stronger:

[...] it becomes difficult to think clearly about the emphasis which the word was intended to establish: on *human* making and innovation. The difficulty cannot be separated from the related difficulty of the senses of *imagination*, which can move towards *dreaming* and *fantasy*, with no necessary connection with the specific practices that are called *imaginative* or *creative* arts..." (*ibid*.: 84).

From what I understand from Williams' analysis, because, first, of the religious connotation (even though the concept has lost the religious significance) and later of the association with psychological terms such as 'imagination', 'dreaming' and 'fantasy', creativity is probably associated with the individual artist.

5. 1. 2. Modern development of the creative individual

So far we have looked at the present significance of the close association between the individual and creativity, and how it has become so. Now we should make an attempt to reconsider the association in the light of the Modernist idea acting as a trigger giving a rise to strong individual artists.

²⁵ For details of the development of the term art, see Williams (1976: 40-3).

One of our findings in the preceding Chapter was that modernity is identified with the birth of the liberal individual (i.e. atomized and sovereign). Of course, it is not very difficult to imagine that what happened in one society also happened elsewhere. This seems to apply to the creative realm (Kato, 1971; Hickman, 2005; Wheeler, 2006; and Josipovici, 2008), as Josipovici asserts that Modernism 'marked a decisive moment' in culture and art (Josipovici, 2008: 14). We should spend a little time on the development of the view that artists are individual. When we looked at the connection between modernity and the shift towards highly individualistic society, we saw that a huge part of the world was affected by this shift and the idea of the creative person did not escape its influence. These points are discussed by the Japanese literary and cultural critic Shuichi Kato (1919 -2008), in his book *Form, Style, Tradition*:

The characterizing feature of the modern age is not that works of art are individualistic; they were always so: one need only remember how different are the cathedrals of Rheims and Laon, each breathing with its own separate life. In modern times, however, the expression of individuality became, in itself, the object of art. A work of art no longer became something individual only when it succeeded, but was individual even before it was art. This quality could hardly fail to be reflected in the assessment of an artist's work. To assess Rouault and Picasso together is more difficult than to assess together Titian and Tintoretto. It may be that the only way to assess any fierce expression of individuality is for its individualism. (Kato, 1971: 56)

He argues that artworks had always been individual but in the modern era the focus moved from the artwork to the person who created it: individuality in the artist became the very purpose of art. Although Kato describes the change here, it may be worth taking into account that, the increasing concern about the individual artist aside, the issue of whether the artist is individual or not does not affect the value of the artwork. Let us consider another example which seems much more critical of what happened. Josipovici discusses the development of the views on the modern individual creative person. His comparison between the famous

composers Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) and Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) gives us a very interesting insight on the artist's creativity and modern individualism.

Why is it that a composer such as Haydn could write a hundred symphonies and only a few years later Beethoven, no less industrious a composer, could only write nine? Quite simply because Haydn did not feel he had to start from scratch. What he had to do was fill a form, a mould. That he filled it supremely well, far better than any of his contemporaries except Mozart, is neither here nor there. [...] what happens with Beethoven is that the development section grows out of proportion to the rest, till it overwhelms the whole, its growth synonymous with the expression of the composer's demonic creativity. [...] Even today Beethoven's symphonies stand in the public imagination for the most powerful expression of an individuality we know we possess but few have it in us to express. (Josipovici, 2008: 15)

This is about composing music not visual art practice, but as Josipovici states that this transcends the form of art, this is a very familiar dilemma for me as a painter. In the thirty years between Haydn and Beethoven, this need for individuation is what happened to the artist. Now 'the most powerful expression of an individuality' is expected of the artist. However, is it really what all artists themselves want? Josipovici continues:

Unfortunately, after Beethoven [...], composers were left with nothing to hold on to except their individuality, and without Beethoven's dynamism and optimism, this gradually led, in the course of the nineteenth century, to an art less and less time-driven, more and more prone to stasis, dreaminess and disintegration. (*ibid.*)

In his remark, the most significant point is that 'composers were left with nothing to hold on to except their individuality'. Beethoven was undoubtedly a great composer, but surely this kind of creativity is not for all artists. This point is also discussed by Kato:

The individual cannot, by itself alone, constitute art. Where art has as its object the expression of individuality, art is aimed at something outside itself. (Kato, 1971: 56)

If they think that pushing one's individuality is not what the art should cling onto, is there something the artist holds on to? Could groupness be an answer? We will find that out in later sections.

If the semantic development of the word creative person as a god-like creator is in the foundation of our perception of the creative individual today, modernity added extra value to the individuality of such a person. Both quotes suggest that it is considered a relatively new movement in the modern era, arguably since the French Revolution, according to Josipovici (2008). Before that the artist was not as individual (like Haydn's case) as we creative practitioners are in the present time (Kato, 1971 and Martin, 2004). Also, what we can identify so far is predominantly a Western idea. Just like our discussion in Chapter Four, is there a different perception of the nature of the individual practitioner outside the modern Western context?

5. 1. 3. Different perceptions of the creative individual

Raymond Williams, in his book *The Long Revolution* – with which Wendy Wheeler starts her concluding chapter, *The importance of creativity* (Wheeler, 2006: 131-160) – asserts that to think that creativity is something outside of our ordinary life is wrong. He writes:

Art is ratified, in the end, by the act of creativity in all our living. Everything we see and do, the whole structure of our relationships and institutions, depends, finally, on an effort of learning, description and communication. We create our human worlds as we have thought of art being created. Art is a major means of precisely this creation. Thus the distinction of art from ordinary living, and the dismissal of art as unpractical or secondary (a 'leisure-time

activity'), are alternative formulations of the same error. If all reality must be learned by the effort to describe successfully, we cannot isolate 'reality' and set art in opposition to it, for dignity or indignity. If all activity depends on response learned by the sharing of descriptions, we cannot submit to be divided into 'Aesthetic Man' and 'Economic Man'. (Williams, 1961: 56)

Here it is emphasized that creativity, by its nature, is a communal means for a human being to communicate with other human beings. Williams warns us that the separation of art from our ordinary life is an error. Creativity is described as a common effort here. Wheeler (2006: 15) stresses that 'human creativity', is not something art specially owns. 'Art is simply a special category of human communication, and making and remaking in general.' (*ibid.*: 131)

In the previous Chapter we found that the Japanese originally had no concept of the individual and had to wait until relatively recently to be introduced to the Western way of seeing one's selfhood and the idea of individuality in relation to that. It was not until after World War II that the Western concept of the individual artist became known to the Japanese people. It seems only natural to consider that this fact may make one assume a possibility of a different sense of the creative individual. Indeed, for me as a non-Western practitioner, the idea that an extraordinary piece of art is created by the extraordinary individual does not adequately describe the creative individual in my culture.

As stated by Helen Westgeest in her book *Zen in the Fifties*, 'there is no tradition of individual-related original art' in Japan (Westgeest, 1996: 200). Of course, even before the concept of the individual was introduced to the country, there must have been creative acts and creative individuals in Japan, which is evident in those artefacts in museums and art galleries, but without the terms to describe them. In Japan, creative individuality is something practitioners would like to achieve after a long-term training, not something they possess from the beginning. For the Japanese artist

individuality referred 'to the personal experience of the world on which one is dependent', and in order to achieve such individuality 'it was much appreciated in the history of Japanese art if an artist, after many years of copying, ended up developing an original style' (*ibid.*).

What exactly is the difference between this view and that of the West, particularly in terms of the creativity-individual relationship? The Japanese Art critic Nihei Nakamura (1994), comparing the Western and Eastern arts, explains that in the West the individual artist puts her/himself against the outside world, expressing the individual story, whereas the Japanese artist expresses the direct experience of the self. Westgeest explains this view as follows:

In Japan 'self', 'original' and 'personal' do not refer to individuality in a Western sense, but to the personal experience of the world on which one is dependent [...]. Hajime Nakamura wrote concerning the difference between the Japanese and Western meaning of 'individuality' it is incorrect to think that individuality does not exist for the Japanese. For them it means the focus on direct experience. Nihei Nakamura, who has a similar opinion, observed that the academic Western artist looked for his own personality by setting his 'ego' off against the outside world. The tradition in the Far East entails the artist seeking an 'archetype', turning in his research to the depth of Nature and the Self. (Westgeest, 1996: 200)

An example is the teaching of the medieval *Noh* master Zeami²⁶ (世阿弥; 1363?-1443?). He insisted that someone who is trying to master an art should practice a lot, but never in a self-serving manner. (Zeami, 1972)²⁷ To this day, Japanese artists believe that they can attain an original style through years of copying (Westgeest, 1996). In contrast, 'in the Western

²⁶ 'Zeami also wrote practical instructions for actors and established the *Noh* theatre as a serious art form. His books are not only instructions but also aesthetic treatises based on the spiritual culture of Japan.' (Wikipedia, 2009)

²⁷ I refer to a modern Japanese translation (1972) of his original by Kazuma Kawase. The original is said to be written in the early fifteenth-century.

tradition in art and literature, creativity means to create something new from scratch' (Bourguignon and Dorsett, 2002: 11). My experience of repetitive drawing practice in the earlier stage of art school education confirms the continuing power of the Zeami approach. In a way, this is a kind of group process. It may be possible to identify a parallel between the approaches of Zeami and Haydn²⁸, and between the Western tradition, developing from the early modern period onwards, of creating *ex nihilo* and Beethoven.

When Wheeler argues that '[c]reativity is impossible in the absence of structure, although it almost certainly requires forms of illicit behaviour such as rule bending or breaking' (Wheeler, 2006: 153), this comes close to describing how I feel when making paintings. However, again what is happening in reality is far from it, as I see it. Art schools in the UK encourage students to acquire a broad base of cultural knowledge and to accumulate and develop 'interesting' ideas. Students are then expected to use these ideas to form a highly personalized practice.

With the cultural background of denying individual-centred creativity, I sympathize with this more than the present Western views on the creative individual discussed above. As an art practitioner, this shows me how I want to see myself doing. Coming from a cultural background that traditionally denies individually centred creativity, but with several years experience of the British method of education, my sympathies remain most comfortably aligned to the Japanese concept of the artistic self. I realize that, to some people, this kind of idea may sound like a demotion of art and its special status in society. However, this view does not diminish my admiration for past masters and current good artists. As

²⁸ It may be worth noting that the artist William Blake (1757-1827) wrote acerbic comments in the margins of his copy of Joshua Reynolds' *Discourses on Art* – and one of the most famous of these is 'To learn the Language of Art, "Copy for Ever" is My Rule' (Blake, 1966: 446). Reynolds was the founder of the British Royal Academy and Blake was considered so original and eccentric as to be almost mad.

already argued, this thesis is trying to find an alternative view of the creative individual.

5. 2. 0. Artists' Groups and the individual practitioner

We should now move on to the subject of artists' groups, and their relationship with the individual practitioner who belongs to the group. As we have just seen, creativity is normally associated with the individual artist not the group. So it is already a challenge to talk about group in the issue of creativity. Is there a possibility at all of talking of creativity of a group? Creativity has been debated in many areas of study – not only art and conventional creative areas like music and theatre. For example, in business, in management in particular, people talk about creativity a great deal. I participated in the 10th EIASM Workshop on Managerial and Organisational Cognition: Creativity in Organization. (18-20 June 2003 in ESSEC Business School, Cergy-Pontoise, France.) As this title suggests it is an increasingly common interest in business to talk about creativity in groups and organisations. Creativity is considered essential in the field of management (Bourguignon and Dorsett, 2002). When one talks about creativity in fine art, it is associated with the individual or the single person. Is it possible to discuss the creativity of a group of artists instead?

Artistic activity does not have the closed frame of managerial activity and although the artist is continually exposed to the influence of others this does not effect his or her sense of personal action. This general assertion deserves to be nuanced according to the type of artistic practice (individual *versus* collective). In the individualistic arts, the frame is limited to the influence of facilitators and audiences, and thus depends on the "porosity" of the artist towards these 'others'. In the 'collective' arts (e.g. acting or playing in an orchestra) the artist's activity is closely interconnected with his/her partners and collaborators. However, here the relationship is mainly viewed as a cooperative action that brings about a common objective. As a result, the activity of others is not perceived as a frame that inhibits personal activity but as a source of creativity.

This is consistent both with a pre-eminence of 'person' over outcome in the arts, and with the general orientation toward freedom of action throughout the field. (*ibid.*: 33)

The debate is based on the different types of artistic practice, i.e. individualistic arts, e.g. fine or visual art, literature etc., and collective arts, e.g. theatre or orchestral music, not in individual and collective in the 'individualistic' arts. 'Individual' and 'collective' creativities definitely interest me. Also, one may argue that groups have their own life and purpose independent from their individual members, as Philip Pettit claims (2001), a sort of character and individuality themselves, or even their own creativity as often discussed in business and management. However, it has to be pointed out that the issue of individual/collective creativity is not the centre of my argument. Therefore, we will not take this strand of group creativity any further; the job here is to establish a debate about the nature of individually oriented practice in the visual arts.

In the next section we look at examples of artists' groups. This is important for us to clearly establish what an artists' group means, when we talk about the relationship between artists' groups and their individual members. Let us now clarify the artists' group in order to relate it to the individual practitioner.

5. 2. 1. Different forms of artists' groups

As already seen above, artists are normally thought to prefer to be alone. Christopher Frayling, Rector of Royal College of Arts, paraphrasing the comedian Groucho Marx, said that '[the artist], as we know, refuses to belong to any club that will accept him or her as member' (Frayling, 2000: 58). Therefore, it is rather ironic that the Groucho Club named after him was established in 1985 in Soho, London, and frequented by celebrities

and artists like the Young British Artists, and pop stars. In Paris in the mid-1800s, Montmartre (and Montparnasse later in the beginning of the twentieth century) was the artist quarter. Now very well known, but then impoverished artists gathered together to share their views, and lived and worked in a commune. Although times have changed, a lot of artists still enjoy this kind of Bohemian community (Soho is a Bohemian quarter in London like Montmartre and Montparnasse in nineteenth century Paris), and sometimes they even decide to call themselves a group, rather than just an informal gathering (e.g. Bloomsbury Group²⁹ and Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood³⁰). So this sort of artist gathering can be regarded as a kind of artists' group.

Next, it is probably necessary to mention the kinds of practice the groups have. Among various forms of arts or creative activities, the area called visual or fine art is predominantly individually oriented. Whereas the areas like music (orchestral and chamber music, in particular) and theatre where practitioners naturally work collaboratively for a final production. Of course, there are some fine art practitioners who work together and the outcome of the working together is owned by all of the members. We do not even know who the individual artists are. An example of such collaborative artists may be YNG, the collaboration between the Japanese artist Yoshitomo Nara and the Graf³¹.

²⁹ They were 'a group of writers, intellectuals and artists who held informal discussions in Bloomsbury throughout the 20th century. This English collective of friends and relatives lived, worked or studied near Bloomsbury in London during the first half of the twentieth century. Their work deeply influenced literature, aesthetics, criticism, and economics as well as modern attitudes towards feminism, pacifism, and sexuality. Its best known members were Virginia Woolf, John Maynard Keynes, E. M. Forster, and Lytton Strachey' (Wikipedia, 2009)

³⁰ Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, sometimes referred to as the PRB, was formed by artists such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Millais and Holman Hunt. This was an artists' group strongly influenced by the ideas of John Ruskin, a critic and philosopher (who also practised art in a small way) well known as the great champion of Turner. (Wikipedia, 2009)

³¹ They had a major exhibition at the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead in 2008. Graf (group of artists) produced a whole environment within which Nara's paintings, drawings and installation pieces were presented.

Also, like the individual artist's case, there are practitioner and art historian's views on groups of artists. I would now like to map out the current literature of artists' groups. In art history, the role played by art movements, groups or 'isms' has been significant. A number of researches have already been done by art historians. A good example is Amy Dempsey (2002) who explains the history of Western art and design (particularly from 1860 to today) not by focusing on individual artists but by looking at shifts from one art movement/group to another. She explains that it has not always been the artists themselves who initiated these movements or groupings. Some of the most familiar names of groups were first provided by critics, curators, collectors or patrons; in fact Impressionism and Fauvism were labels applied by sarcastic critics; some were exhibition societies (e.g. Les Vingt and the Salon de la Rose+Croix), some relate to a time period (e.g. Post-Impressionism) or a medium (such as video); and the Bauhaus was an educational institution. It is an interesting exercise to think of my own group membership in the historical categories described in Dempsey's research. There is very little relevance between what her 'outsider's' view on artists' groups or movements and my first-hand experience as a member of one. As far as my knowledge is stretched, after a literature research on artist groups, what is largely available to us is an historical account of artists who were put into the categories of isms or art movements by art historians and critics.

Having discussed what the individual visual art practitioner means in the previous section, we now understand how strongly being individual is associated with the creative practitioner. One would imagine a group being against the rebellious and rule-breaking nature of the artist. The visual art practitioner owns their experience and the artwork as a result of self-expression and 'collective' creativity is not a mainstream concern in fine art or visual art practice. However, as the examples of the Paris and London artist communities indicate, artists seem always to like gathering

together to discuss their work, ideas and art in general. I am myself well aware, from my experience, how this kind of sharing is exciting and valuable for the practitioner.

What this thesis is concerned with is groups of visual artists who work together with something to tie together the different individual artists, such as aims, philosophy, leadership, etc., and each of whom has their own individual practice, and they themselves (not art critics, for example) agree to call themselves a group (or different words with the similar meaning, such as 'brotherhood'). It can certainly be said that artists form groups for different reasons and purposes. It seems to be true that 1) artists like being in groups, whether or not they are created by critics, historians or other artists; 2) artists like to form groups for a wide range of reasons that do not necessarily overlap with the intentions of group-forming historians and critics. Nevertheless, the topic of artists' groups in this thesis does not entail either just a loose community of artists, collaborative work by a group of artists or the retrospective grouping of artists by someone else like art historians, described above.

5. 2. 2. Being a member of an artists' group

Although artists are considered individualistic, they like gathering and forming groups at the same time. Given that we understand that so far, the main issue of this section is to discuss how individual members would actually feel about being part of such artists' groups. This thesis is meant to provide us with a better understanding of those practitioners who work in a group by their choice. Needless to say, there are artists who are against belonging to any form of artists' group, because groups can be restricting to their members, which goes against the ethos of the creative individual considered above. And the purpose of this thesis is not meant to dismiss the individual nature of artists practice.

The practitioner working alone is independent, free, and can pursue their own strength; at the same time they can be vulnerable, due to the need for assurance, loneliness, constant confrontation. On the other hand, the practitioner working in a group³² may develop a group identity which helps them to continue practicing. However, the group can also limit freedom for the individual practitioner who may be considered less strong than those who work alone. Why might an artist want to take part in a group, despite the fact that it has a potential to be a restriction? What is really happening in artists groups? I am going to attempt to address this 'insider' knowledge in the next section by extrapolating the general character of artists groups from two contrasting examples.

5. 2. 3. The Stuckists and Ryu Group

In the early stage of this PhD research I curated, in collaboration with my fellow PhD student Paul Harvey, a group exhibition of the two groups entitled *Members Only* which will be explained in the next Chapter. Harvey is a prominent painter and a member of the art movement called the Stuckists. The aim of the exhibition was to juxtapose the two currently active artists' groups from the UK and Japan: i.e. the Stuckists³³ and Ryu Group³⁴. In many ways the two groups are at two extremes. According to

³² The term 'group' here does not include collaboration, or collaborative art, where artists work together for the final production/outcome. In such a group, artists own their own independent practice.

³³ The Stuckists: 'Your paintings are stuck, you are stuck! Stuck! Stuck! Stuck!' (Tracey Emin) Stuckism is a philosophy derived from Buddhism and Kabbalah and it stresses the value of seeking truth, integrity, emotional engagement, vision and communication. Stuckism is the radical international art movement for contemporary figurative painting with ideas. It purports to oppose the pretensions of conceptual art. It is anti-anti-art. It is the first Remodernist art group. (Stuckism International, 2004)

³⁴ Ryu Art Group: The word 'Ryu' (pronounced /rjú:/) signifies a wing flapping in the wind and conveys the sense of bird rising ever higher in the sky. It also implies the wish that no

Harvey, the Stuckists actually consist of over a hundred smaller groups worldwide like satellites. On the other hand, the Ryu Group has a strong educational aspect based on the Japanese tradition of teacher-disciple relationship. Interestingly, the Stuckists seem to have, although they are one big group, a Western individualistic approach towards each smaller group. Paul Harvey is known as a Newcastle Stuckist, for instance. I talk more about the differences (and similarities) between the two groups in the description of the group exhibition Harvey and I curated in Chapter Six. For the present, we should concentrate on our personal experiences in order to examine what impact the groups have on their individual members.

Recently, I had a conversation with Harvey (see Appendix 1 for the full transcript) on our membership of our respective groups i.e. the Stuckists in his case and the Ryu Group in mine. In our conversation we particularly discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the singular visual art practitioner who works alone and who works in a group situation, from our own experiences. Here, I would like to extract some key points in the dialogue. They are going to be shown in italicized paragraphs.

First, we discussed the reasons why we are in the group, which I think reflects the nature of groups:

Harvey: [After his career as a musician] when I got back to kind of 'doing art' I did not really understand art and what I realised was, that with my first few paintings I was just doing it because I loved it and then I started thinking; yeah I like them, but they are not really art. I don't feel I have been putting art into it, and I did not know what that meant. And it was around that time where I did not really know what to do, that I read that article on the Stuckists and it just immediately resonated with me you know, what they were saying, the manifesto, the paintings, I just thought: that is what I am, I feel like they feel. So I got in touch with them and ended up kind of

matter how far apart we may be, we should continue to influence one another, calling to each other from far and wide. (Hamano, 1998)

being part of the movement and actually it really focussed what I was doing and it helped me understand what I was actually doing.

Oshima: In my case it is slightly different because the founder of the group is my high school art teacher. But he got me into this art world. I always liked drawing and painting but he found some kind of talent in me and recommended me to carry on studying art, so, it is like a student-teacher relationship bringing me into the group.

Harvey chose to join to give his art a context or meaning. On the other hand, for me it was my relationship with my master (a respect and wish to learn from him) that made me decide to join. However, in both cases it was the expectation of learning, or maximizing our potential as a fine art practitioner by being part of the group, that we wanted to join it. We both agreed that the group gives us motivation to keep practising.

The most interesting point, in relation to the theme of this thesis, brought up during the conversation was when Harvey asked me the following question:

Harvey: Have you ever thought that being part of a group might be just a safety net? What I mean is that you feel that if you were left on your own, if you were totally on your own, that you wouldn't be able to deal with it perhaps? This is something I think about.

Indeed this is something those who are members of a group may feel from time to time, but what does it say about the artist's individuality?:

Oshima: Sometimes I feel like that, imagine that, because my practice and my life is [...] so involved with the group. So suddenly if it disappears I would feel like I am not safe, I will feel like that, I think.

Harvey: Of course, and your work would probably change as well, this is what I am doubtful about as well, is it, how [...] I think [...] I have learned, and I listened to people, and I got a lot out of it, how would it be if I now left and just be totally on my own? Would it get better in another way? Would I feel free of the burden of it?

As Harvey says, it may be a burden being part of any group. However, at the same time, because the presence of the group is so imbedded in our identity as a creative person and practice, we both think that the group gives us, its members, reasons or encouragement to work and without them we would feel lost.

My dialogue with Paul Harvey shows that we both think ourselves as individual practitioners irrespective of the difference in our cultural background and different systems of the groups. I am aware that this thesis has only these two artists groups as examples and some may find it not enough to prove anything. These two very different forms of artists' groups present interesting perceptions about groupness in Japan and the UK, and are relevant to the above discussion as a socio-cultural comparison in individual-group relationship. We should next develop a visual analysis of the artist's selfhood using the triad diagrams.

5. 3. 0. Diagram VI: The creative individual

What I have realised after several years at Northumbria University is that it is extremely difficult, almost impossible, for me to identify myself as a fine art practitioner without the presence of our master Hamano and the Ryu Group, although I am surrounded by an educational environment that continually produces artists who claim that they do not need the context of group. This leads me to reflect upon Stuckist membership as being similar to that of the Ryu Group in that they communicate with the outside world as Stuckists. As we have seen above in the conversation between Paul Harvey and myself, for practitioners like us working in an artists' group, the group can mean more than just what we work within as in the case of workplaces. It can be said that my integrity as an individual fine art

practitioner entails not only myself as a person but also my practice and the group membership in the Ryu Group. What does this exactly mean?

I have, like anyone else, a creative potential. Yet, it is impossible to embody my creativity without a means of self-expression, that is my paintings. They are a means of creative self-expression through the formal production of lines, shapes and colours. Looking at one of my paintings is an opportunity for me to reflect upon the 'self' who has created these artworks. Through the Group I find meaning in being an artistic self. They, my creative potential, my practice and my group context put together, create my identity as an art practitioner. The Group provides a social context for the Secondness (action-reaction relationship) of my self-expression in my artworks and the Firstness (pureness, potential) of my creativity. Therefore, being creative is all potential and no materialization; making paintings facilitates a range of engagements with my-self; but this does not automatically manifest a sense of being an artist, and group membership provides a medium of connection that embodies 'myself' as an artist. Being in the presence of the Ryu Group has enabled me to communicate as an artist with people outside the group environment, I am an artist over-and-above my creativity and myself. The diagram below (Figure 21) is a visual representation of the relationship between the three.

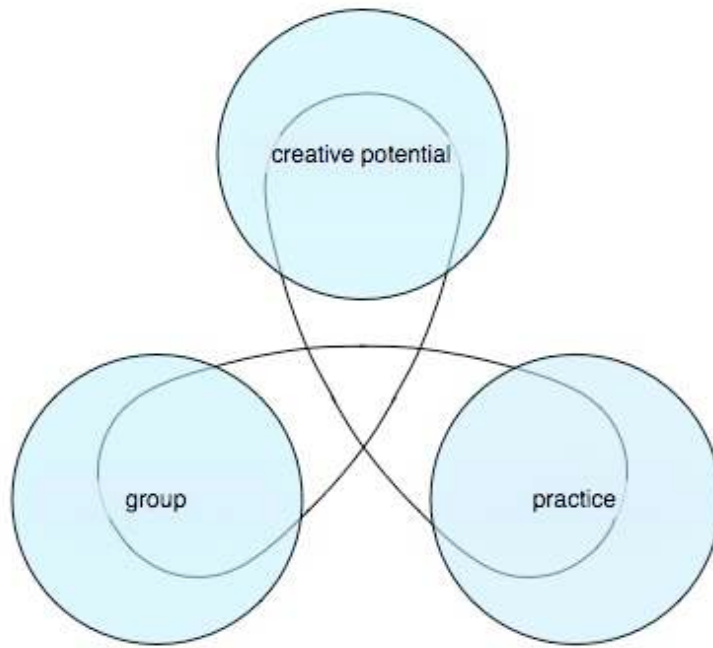


Figure 21: Author's identity as a fine art practitioner

The idea that the practitioner's identity generated from a combination of different aspects, however, is not something only the group-based practitioner like myself would claim. Every practitioner has creative potential, practice (and its outcome, i.e. artworks) and the context where the artist and their work are introduced to the outside world (exhibitions are the most obvious example). In other words, they are described as the practitioner's creative potential, their studio practice or development of ideas, which is more or less kept private, and their creativity and practice together presented to, the broader art community (artists and audience). The most obvious example is an exhibition. If you are an art student, you regularly take part in group crits and tutorials. All artists are part of a kind of big group called the art community, including art schools. The only difference between this and my identity is that most artists do not have a specific group as the context of their creativity and practice (Figure 22).

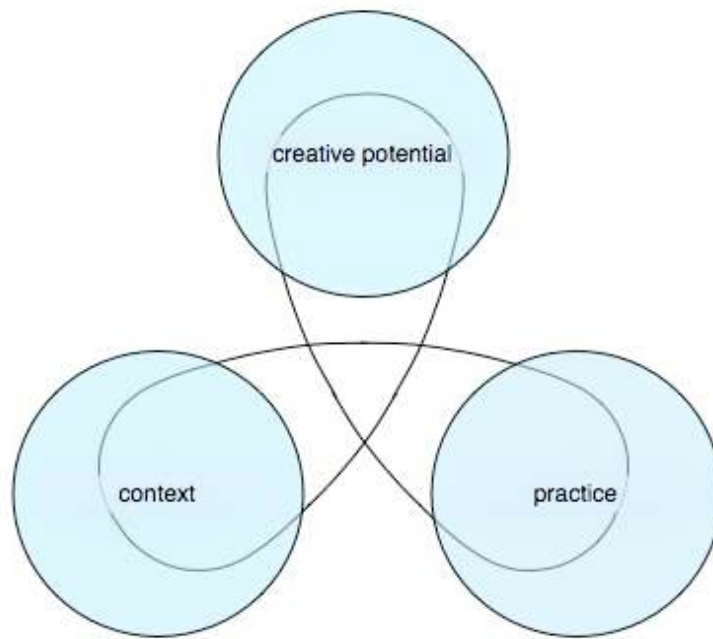


Figure 22: Identity of a individual fine art practitioner

The above experiment suggests that it is possible to talk about the artist's individuality in as intricately multi-layered and relational way as the non-artist individual. In Chapter Four we discussed the role of the concept groupness in achieving an alternative view of the individual. As we found out, at the end of Chapter Four using the triadic diagram (Figures 19 and 20, pages 93-4), the groupness idea allows us to see beyond the straightforward division between individual and group, and using groupness enables us to give our idea of the individual a different dimension, i.e. the group to be a deeply rooted part of the individual. The result was the finding of the idea of singularity- and groupness- oriented individuality. The former one's individuality is based on its singularity and the latter its groupness. It may be worth considering if it is possible to reiterate the thought experiment carried out in the previous Chapter on the creative individual. And the next question we would like to ask is: Where does the creative potential come from?

5. 3. 1. Diagram VII: Singularity- and groupness- based individual practitioners

The aim of this section is to create a set of triadic diagrams to talk about the individual practitioner. We have, in fact, already noticed triadic diagrams of the creative individual: one of a group member and the other of a non-group artist (Figures 21 and 22, page 118-9) in the previous section. In the previous version the content of the Thirdness circle was changed depending on whether the practitioner is a group member or not. This time, however, our point of focus is the Firstness circle, which represents one's creative potential. We discussed above that in modern Western art, the practitioner's individuality is considered something they intrinsically possess. Whereas in Japan traditionally in creative practice there is no concept of expressing one's individuality as though the individuality is in the practitioner. Also, Japanese or not, group-based practitioners, like myself, may agree with this view. This distinction raises a question as to where the individuality is coming from in the latter case.

Let us assume that the Firstness circle of a creative practice is our *individual* creative potential. Because the potential should belong to the individual self, it seems convenient to think the creative potential is something special to a particular individual. For instance, Martin's claim that the individual practitioner is a person who is an 'autonomous, self-contained, psychologically complex person' (2004: 5), or a genius seems to support this. The Secondness and Thirdness circles remain the same: the relationship between the practitioner and their practice and the context of the practitioner-practice relationship. The relationship between the practitioner and the artwork are given meanings by other people and the context. In this way, the group is something to give them a context.

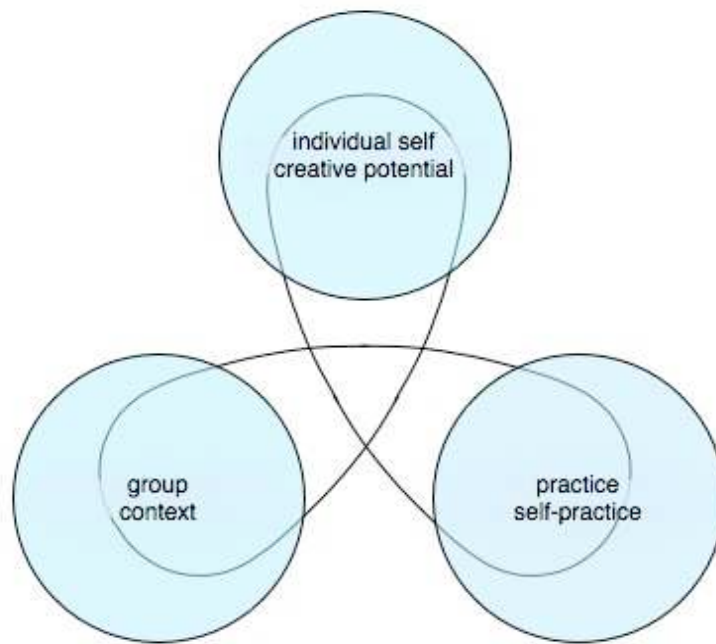


Figure 23: Singularity-based individual artist

This is, as we seen above (Figures 21 and 22), a fairly established idea of a creative practice. Now, can groupness replace the individual in Firstness, i.e. creative potential? What does it mean to have groupness as the potential? Wendy Wheeler’s argument below seems to confirm the hypothesis:

The development of our understanding of life in complex systems theory, of stratification, emergence and self-organisation – as in our improved understanding of creativity itself as emergent from semiotic complexity – does not dispense with analytic reduction, but adds upon it another evolved capacity in our cultural understanding. (*ibid.*: 155)

Suppose that groupness can come into the Firstness circle, what will happen to the other two? The Secondness spot is their practice (assuming it is likely that it remains the same because the practitioner is bound to have a practice) and the practice is their own in the sense that the practitioner has individual practice (i.e. a non-‘collaborative’ practice). The potential and practice together create their identity as an individual

practitioner. Thus the creative individual lands in the Thirdness circle, replacing group.

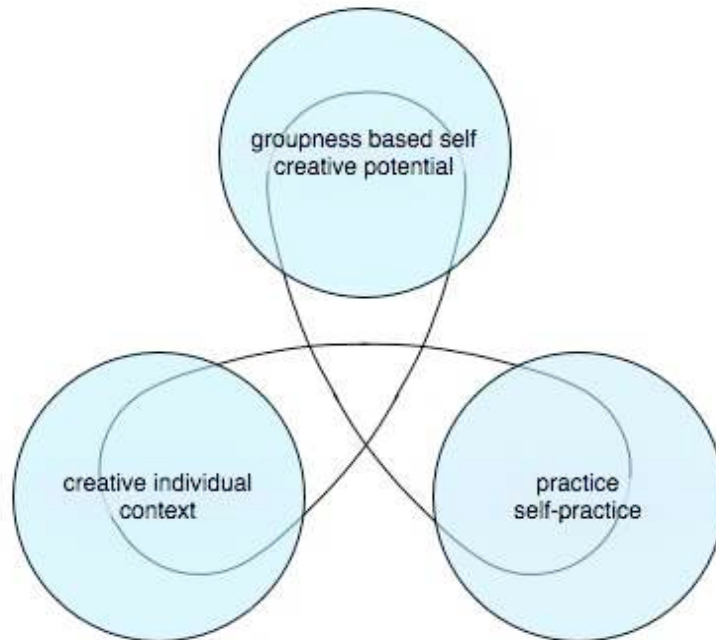


Figure 24: Groupness-based individual artist

The role of this Chapter is to bring in the argument of the triadic relational perception of the individual to our discussion of fine art practice. We have examined whether the different sense of individuality based on groupness can be adapted to the practitioner's individuality. Arriving at the conclusion here that we can assume that for some artists it is groupness on which their individuality is based, we now have to consider how the investigation and discussion so far can be used in talking about one's practice. In the subsequent Chapter we turn to discuss why this research is a practice-led research and how far the methodology of these investigations and visual thought experiments can provide for other practitioners.

Chapter Six: Practical engagements with individuality and groupness

6. 0. Practice-led methodology

This research journey began questioning what being an individual means to an art practitioner working in a group situation, like myself. The ultimate aim of this piece of research is to establish a methodology for such a practitioner to investigate their individuality through their practice. It was my assumption, as a fine art practitioner, that a practice should stipulate not a methodology but some interests to motivate the practitioner to undergo the practice, therefore, a practice-led methodology should emerge from a practice.

In this Chapter the practice-led nature of my methodology will be discussed. In order to understand the individual in relation to groupness in general society and in fine art practice; in particular, the thesis, up to this point, has investigated an East-West contrast in philosophical and cultural theories about individuality and community. Although this research is intended as a piece of practice-led research, my own practice as a painter has hardly been mentioned since the brief word on it in the introduction. Instead, the centre of focus has been the exploration of the meaning of being an individual practitioner. The purpose of this part of the thesis, as the concluding chapter, is to explore the practice-led character of this research and to define my methodology: that is, my approach as a practice-led researcher as it could be used by other practitioners in the contexts of their professional, teaching and research careers.

I shall begin with finding a common perception of what a practice-led research means and does. The AHRC's research review in 2007 on

practice-led research in art, design and architecture³⁵ reported that ‘the term ‘practice-led’ research is used to describe a great diversity of practices and methodologies, as well as giving rise to a good deal of debate.’ This seems to suggest that the developing nature of a practice-led PhD allows the term practice-led to be interpreted flexibly and researchers like myself to explore their own method of achieving a practice-led identity. My response to this report is to ask the question: is it possible to undertake practice-led research without discussing my practice (i.e. my artworks) as an individual artist? In other words, can I fulfil my research goals entirely on the basis of being a member of an artists’ group? In what follows I would like to debate the actual method I have developed and used to research my individuality within my group activities.

Is it an action research method I am using in my project? This question gives rise to an interesting debate. Action research is a participatory process of ‘knowing’ and it contrasts with conventional academic approaches (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). In other words, this process, in which the investigation proceeds by actually doing things, enables a professionally engaged researcher to ‘set the research agenda and determine the methodology’ without following the ‘suggestion of others’ (Winch and Gingell, 1999: 8). The diversity of practice-led methodologies discussed in the AHRC report suggests that the practitioner has to design their own approach creatively. In this PhD research my individuality as a fine art practitioner is questioned and examined in relation to my group membership. Therefore, the action research method appears to be a solution for practice-led research because of its adaptability and participatory characteristics. So far, the practice-led character of my research seems to be backed up by these discussions.

³⁵ Published in 2007 and became available online January 2008.

The usual way of defining the approach is that '[t]he action researcher will identify an issue that needs to be resolved. She will design an intervention and record the effects of its implementation, review the outcome and disseminate her result' (Winch and Gingell 1999: 8). In short, in practice-led research the convention is that the situation, concerns, and intervention stages are embedded in a creative practice and the production of artworks is part of the evidence of what has happened. However, I am not going to present my paintings in this role, although I am going to present them as evidence that I am an individual artist who is a member of an artists' group. Instead, my individual involvement with group situations is counted as the source of the concerns I want to investigate. Although this research does not interrogate my artwork in an evidential manner, it is still necessary for me to conduct an ongoing practice as an individual which results in a body of work.

6. 1. Action research

To begin with, it has to be made clear that this research is not a conventional art historical account of artists or artists' groups, although it is not a practice-led study in the most common sense where the researcher produces creative works that are documented, reflected upon and given a theoretical commentary, either. Although the quality of my practice is not central to this research (it is very important for me as an arts practitioner, needless to say), as a researcher I have to practice to participate in my investigation, I need my experiences as a creative individual to understand a creative group I am involved with. This boils down to the idea that this project is a first person inquiry that combines a visual art practice with an action research method aimed at the communal situation generated by being a Ryu Artist. So, how does this particular piece of action research method work?

As we have seen above, an action research requires a *situation*; it requires a set of circumstances to be in place first. In this sense, my group situation requires the preliminary situation of being an individual: I needed to be an artist on my own in order to be part of the Ryu Group. As a result, my *concerns* and *issues* are the tensions generated by the embedding of my individuality within an artists' group situation. If this is so, then my planned *intervention* includes the research concepts I have devised. For example, the development of diagrams that clarify the individual-group relations (Chapter Three) and my coining of the term groupness in order to give greater definition to the concepts of artistic individuality (Chapter Four and Five). These devices have helped me understand my activities as a fine art practitioner, as a project organizer and a teacher, as the creator of groupness situations (for example, my work on a Foundation Diploma module at Northumbria University and my curation of group exhibitions). Also, the triadic diagram has enabled a visual investigation of individual/community relationship, allowing me to document and study all the facets of the action research situation that form the topic of this thesis. My proposed action research components are listed in the table below:

My action research

- 1 Situation: 'I am an individual.'
- 2 Concerns/issues: My individuality in a group situation in visual art practice.
- 3 Intervention:
 1. Development of diagram: a visual exploration of the nature of the individual.
 2. Defining the term groupness.
 3. Creating groupness situations for other practitioners.
- 4 Documentation:
 1. Inquiry group discussions on my paintings.
 2. Curating exhibitions and teaching.
- 5 Dissemination: Writing of this thesis.

Having developed the triad diagrams in Chapters Two and Three to examine one's individuality, my first intervention is to reflect on the process of drawing the diagrams in relation to that of my painting. In my discussion above the difficulty of expressing the free, non-sequential movement between the three elements was pointed out (see pages 38 and 39). In response to the problem I suggested that it would be much easier to express that fluidity in my paintings. As mentioned above, I do not intend in this thesis to discuss the quality or contents of my paintings, but the visual sophistication of the painting process does lend itself to the subtle spatial interactions that cannot be represented in a simple, two-dimensional linear diagram. As a practice-led researcher working within the visual arts it seems appropriate to utilise my compositional skills and experience with colour and surface qualities in this way. Of course, all this experience of drawing and painting is based on my first-person experience, and it, therefore, requires some objective element in order for it to be documented. I consider using the inquiry group method.

The second part of the intervention will be the demonstration of the term groupness. Chapter Four was an attempt to define the term groupness devised to discuss different meanings of individuality. The definition of the term groupness which I discovered in the philosophy of the Kyoto School: selfness springs out of the greater whole was developed throughout Chapter Four. Our discussion was based on the cultural and philosophical investigation of the individual-group relations, which led to the understanding of different notions of the individual in non-individualistic Japan and the individualistic West. However, after a careful unfolding of the idea of groupness, we arrived at the terminology which could demonstrate to us that there are different senses of individuality beyond the cultural differences. Then, in Chapter Five we attempted to apply the discussion of different kinds of individuality in the realm of fine art. Based on the terminology, the third intervention, which will be looked at in a section below, is an experiment to utilize the concept by actually providing

groupness situations for the other art practitioners. I have curated two group exhibitions and guided the overseas foundation course students to have a group identity through an exhibition project alongside their own practice.

In the following sections we will look at the details of the both individuality- and groupness- oriented projects which are set up to document my practice as an individual practitioner and a group member.

6. 2. 0. Individual practice and inquiry group



Figure 25: Studio practice

Let us move onto the first intervention: a visual exploration of the nature of the individual. In my studio I work as an individual practitioner and this studio work is a first-person experience (Figure 25). Is it possible to document the first-person experience? Given that the purpose of this

thesis is not to give a critical analysis of my actual paintings, the focus should be on my individuality embodied in my visual work produced in this first-person situation. In order to represent the subjective experience like my own practice as objectively as I could, I would like to apply the triadic diagram developed throughout Chapter Two and Three to discuss the relational nature of one's individuality.

I proposed in Chapter Two the triad diagram with which I tried to illustrate the individual self in reference to the final three images of the *Ten Ox-herd Pictures* used by Zen Buddhists to train monks to attain enlightenment. The diagram was created in an attempt to illustrate the relational and dynamic nature of one's self described in Zen Buddhism. The diagram gave us an interesting insight into individuality. And so, let us briefly go back to the diagram of the relationship between the three images (Figure 5, page 29). The pictures numbered from I to VII illustrate the process by which the ox-herd attains his true self, whereas the pictures numbered from VIII to X depict the three different aspects of the nature of the self.



Figure 26: Studio desk

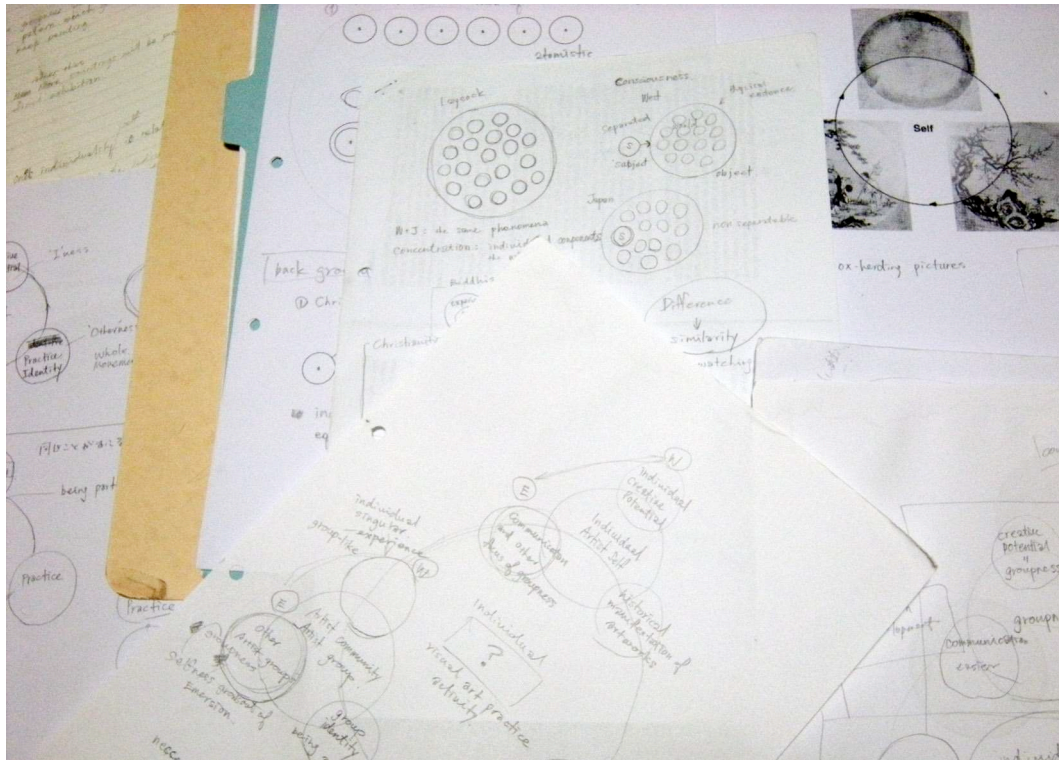


Figure 27: Notebooks

My diagram reproduced this latter idea as a circular movement in which the three aspects followed each other in a linear succession (Figure 9, page 38). It was as if picture VIII was needed in order to move on to picture IX and picture IX to move on to picture X. However, the more I thought about the true meaning of this final triad of images, the more I realized that the phenomenon of the individual self was embodied in the dynamic association of all three aspects. They interacted with each other in all directions simultaneously. My diagram had failed to express this dynamic. Then the diagram was further improved with the more complicated shape based on the 'Borromean knot' applied by Floyd Merrell to depict the relationship between the three categories developed by Charles Sanders Peirce (Figure 11, page 56). It certainly helped the diagram to be more effective to express the dynamic movements. Still, the simple lines and shapes were unable to describe these non-linear, non-

successive relationships. They also failed to unite the different parts into an effective whole.

It was particularly frustrating because I felt that my paintings were capable of conveying spatial and relational complexity in a single image. The movement and relationship between the lines are much more dynamic and fluid than the fixed shape of the diagrams. The paintings have multi-layered surfaces created by applying layers of acrylic paint which are sanded down in order to apply further layers that build up into a translucent surface that implies a great deal of depth under the surface of an ostensibly flat surface (Figure 28) . Let us look at some of the paintings (Figures 29 to 31) to see what I am describing. For example, the painting on the bottom (Figure 28) is not a completed piece. I paint the white over layers I created before that and sand the white layer off so the layers below can be seen. Such effect is seen also in Figure 29. This process sounds rather mechanical but the reader will see in the painting illustrated below that the visual effect is a spatial uncertainty about which layer is nearest, and which farthest away. The top layer easily becomes the bottom layer and vice versa. This surface uncertainty creates an ambiguity in which shapes interact in many different directions at once.



Figure 28: Sanding down the surface (photographed by Christina Kolaiti)



Figure 29: *Untitled* (2008)



Figure 30: *Untitled* (2008)

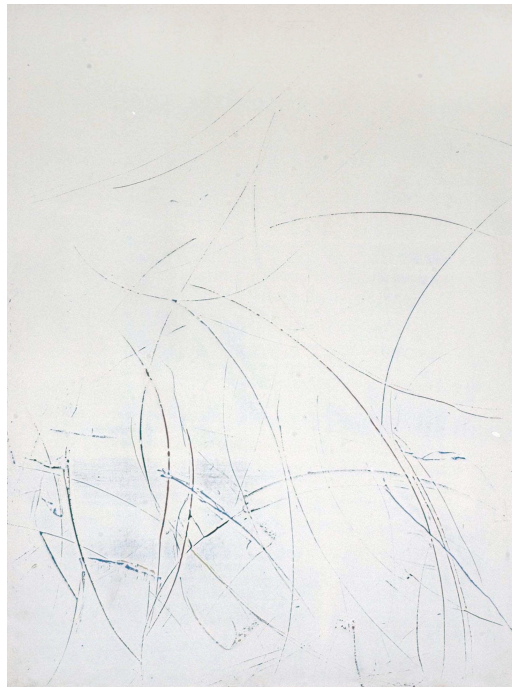


Figure 31: *Untitled* (2008)

Also, the way I work in my studio is important in terms of talking about dynamics between the paintings. I work on several paintings at the same time enabling me to turn my attention rapidly from one to the other (Figure 32). I do not stick to one painting until I have finished with it. I like to make creative decisions as I overview a set of paintings laid on the floor. I work on one painting by responding to the relationship between the entire set as well as the space within a single piece. The physical movement between paintings is an important part of the painting process.



Figure 32: Working in the studio (photographed by Christina Kolaiti)

6. 2. 1. Research inquiry group

As I mentioned above, my experience of creating the above artworks is as an individual and involves first-person enquiry. At this point I established an enquiry group in order to help me objectify my personal responses to the spatial ambiguity of my paintings and to support my understanding of the impact of this visual quality on the original triadic diagram (Figure 9). In forming this group I also introduced a new level of 'groupness' into my individual practice. The group consisted of other practice-led researchers at Northumbria. All were artists and, therefore, sensitive to the visual dynamics of the painting process. Together we were able to discuss some of the subtle qualities not present in the diagram and begin to describe how the paintings improved our understanding of the fluid nature of the self. In this section I want to provide a brief description of how these discussions helped my research.

First, let me spare a few words on the method of Co-operative Inquiry. This action research methodology³⁶ is where a group of informed or interested people meet to share and solve problems related to specific projects associated with their communal needs (Heron and Reason, 2001). Artists can also benefit from this method. For example, Poyan Yee, my fellow PhD researcher at Northumbria University and an artist-curator in Hexham General Hospital, leads focus group workshops in her art and healthcare research project.³⁷ As a result of working with the participants (both people in the hospital, i.e. patients and members of staff, and local artists who provide artworks), Yee is able to curate exhibitions that reflect

³⁶ Co-operative inquiry is an antidote to the traditional research 'on people', in which 'the role of researcher and subject are mutually exclusive: the researcher only contributes the thinking that goes into the project, and the subjects only contribute the action to be studied' (Heron and Reason, 2001: 179).

³⁷ Poyan Yee's art and healthcare project is led by Northumbria University in collaboration with the Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (NHCT). Her research interest is to create a healing process through communication and exhibition as outcome of it.

or represent the visions of the participants for the improvement of their healthcare environment. Simply put, this process is used to encourage people with similar backgrounds or interests to tackle particular issues by sharing opinions and experience. However, as mentioned above my approach to this research method is that it can also bring a sense of groupness to the entirely singular process of reflecting on my artworks: that is, the individuality that actively shapes the process of producing my paintings. As a result my creative practice is once again brought into the kind of relationship between individual artists and artists groups that constitutes the core idea of my research.



Figure 33: Paintings and the *Oxherding Pictures* shown together

My enquiry group discussions constitute an experiment in which my paintings are seen in different ways by different artists. I organised three sessions in which the participating artists looked at my paintings in order to consider their relationship with the triadic diagram (Figure 33). This was, on each occasion, a studio discussion; the paintings were not exhibited, they were displayed together in an informal arrangement against a studio

wall. The question was whether one could make parallels between the paintings, the diagram, and the original *Oxherding Pictures* VIII, IX and X (Figure 5, page 29). Of course, my paintings are abstract compositions in which layers of colour and compositional movement carry most of the effect. They were never intended as illustrations and I believe that I would have created paintings like this without reference to my interest in the Zen imagery.

All the sessions began with an explanation of what each of the Zen pictures represents and how the diagram was developed in order to illustrate my individuality. I then gave the group a description of the problems associated with depicting the free non-directional movement that is implied in the three final *Oxherding Pictures* but not captured by the diagram. The group felt that the two-way dynamic of line drawing (lines point either forward or backward) made it impossible to convey the complexity of this fluidity in diagrammatic form. However the group felt that in my paintings the relationship between passages of colour, shape and spatial layering suggested a wide range of directional possibilities. This proposition linked the group discussion to my interest in the *Oxherding Pictures* described above in Chapter Two.

The group quickly selected three paintings to represent the three parts of the triadic diagram. It had been very difficult for me to make this kind of decision. I was not as clear as the group when it came to choosing which painting paralleled which one of the *Oxherding* pictures, because, as mentioned above, it was not my intention to produce illustrations. In my mind they remain entirely abstract with no definite external referent. Here groupness provided an alternative decision-making process that was not available to me as an individual artist. It was as if I was looking at my paintings with different eyes. Having selected three paintings, the group also suggested that these abstracts could represent the *process* of painting and this process could be said to exhibit similarities to the multi-

directional interaction I had wanted to, but failed to, visualize in the diagram. During the discussion we noticed that the paintings frequently returned to similar compositional patterns, and that the painterly processes that produced these patterns emerged from a very open-ended approach to pictorial space – just the kind of spatial imagination that I was not able to utilize when I was constructing the diagram.



Figure 34: First enquiry group session (photographed by Christina Kolaiti)

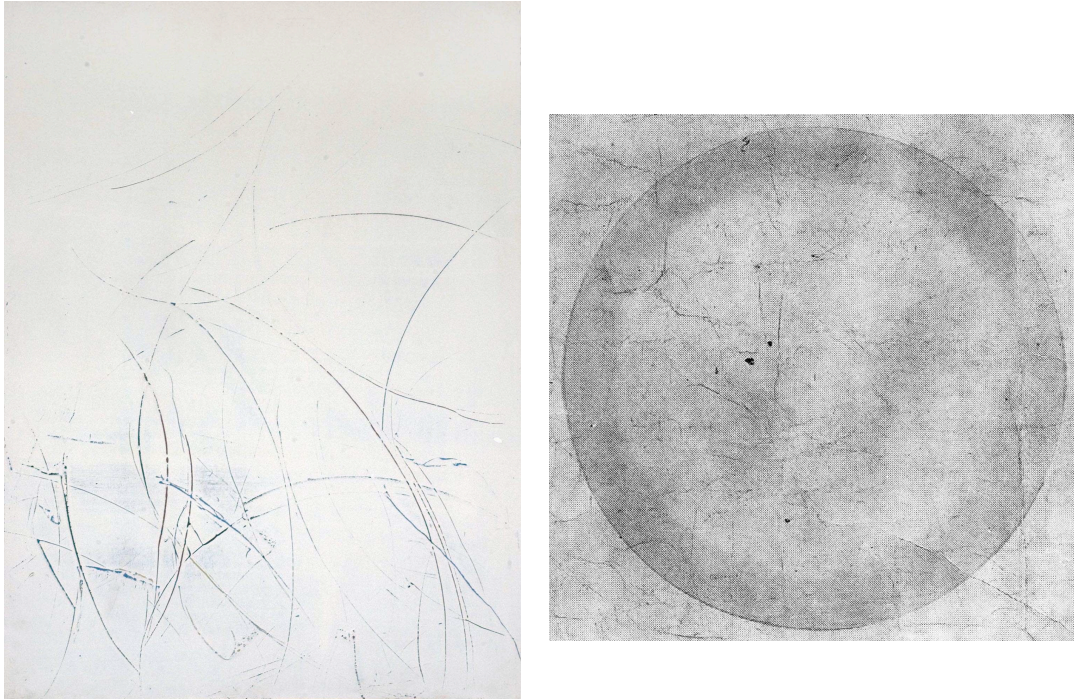


Figure 35: Painting in progress (left) and Picture VIII from the *Ten Oxherding Pictures* (right)

One of the first discoveries in the sessions was the relevance of one particular painting to the *Oxherding Pictures*. Everyone in the group decided that the appearance of the painting above (Figure 35) matched Picture VIII. Up to this point I thought of this piece as ‘work in progress’, but the conversation with the group persuaded me to think again and I now began to treat this painting as a resolved image. An interesting feature of this work was the spatial emptiness created by the ‘blacking out’ I had applied to the surface in order to continue, at a later stage, with further washes of colour. Once the group had made me aware of the relationship between the emptiness in this work and that of Picture VIII I was able to review my own ability to generate deep spaces on a two dimensional plane. It is clear that my ‘blacking out’ does not actually produce blankness. What one can see is an open, atmospheric recession that is established, step by step, between various arc-like lines. The original Picture VIII is empty but nevertheless proposes to the Zen-aware viewer that this emptiness is the birthplace of everything. Once again, it is

worth pointing out the role of groupness in helping me arrive at this association in my own artwork. I was not conscious of the resemblance when I was working on the painting, but group reflection identified a similarity that made me reinterpret the spatial dimension of my interest in abstract art. For the next session I decided to show only two other paintings with this central blanked-out piece. As a result, the next group (a different group of artists) began to discuss the triadic nature of the diagram with unavoidable focus and with, from my point of view, a stronger platform of knowledge created by the agreement reached with the previous over the blanked-out image. At this point we were able to discuss the three paintings in my studio as though they had always been based on the final three *Oxherding Pictures*. It was as if the enquiry group was determining the meaning of my work and I was able to, in the spirit of my research, give up my individuality to gain new knowledge that would have been unavailable to me as a lone, individual practitioner.

It is also worth noting that, as the sessions progressed, the studio floor became an increasingly important tool for revising my understanding of my own work. By placing the paintings on the floor in the same format as the diagram I was also returning them to the state in which they were created (I paint them horizontally by laying two or three empty panels together on the floor and then, standing over them, I move from one to another adding areas of colour across all the surfaces). The group commented on the similarity between this process of creation, a technique that involves viewing the compositions from different directions as they come into being, and my description of the final *Oxherding Pictures*. As result I was now able to link my approach to painting to the fluid multi-directional flow that was so difficult to convey with the three, rather static, components of the diagram.



Figure 36: Second session (photographed by Christina Kolaiti)

The experimental inquiry group sessions were attempts to understand what groupness is in the individual practice by discussing the relationship between the paintings and diagram as an improving factor to the diagram developed in Chapter Two (Figure 9). What has this enquiry group experiment added to the understanding of my research? The sessions, as mentioned above, brought a groupness factor into individual practice. Artists or art students may claim that this group process resembles group crits in which a group of artists exchange opinions over a body of artwork, which is a regular practice in any art school environment. Also, this is distinct from the usual collaborative sense in which artists work together which results in a final production. Returning to the triadic diagram with which we discussed practitioner's individuality based on groupness as (Figure 24, page 122), the role of my paintings (practice) as Secondness is really set free of my individuality. My individuality as a practitioner is really a result of the group process.



Figure 37: Third session (photographed by Christina Kolaiti)

6. 3. 0. Groupness in practice

In the following sections we shall move onto another intervention proposed above: the creating of groupness situations for other practitioners. During the period of this research I curated exhibitions and organized events whilst I continued to create paintings of my own. Much of this activity was related to my role in the Ryu Group which I have discussed in the introduction. Although the Ryu activities play an important role in terms of thinking about my individuality in this thesis, I would not go into the details of those here. It is the point of the thesis: my membership as part of my everyday practice, not what the Group do, is concerned. Not only that, but because I do not have an ownership – it is the whole group’s decision – for the events and projects by the Ryu Group I have been involved with. The Group has been developed by so many different members over time in its history long before I joined them, and I happen to be experiencing a moment of life of the Group with complicated layers of relations – Wheeler (2006) describes this as ‘stratification’. And because everyone of the group is involved with those activities, it does not seem ethical to me to talk about them as my own research and it has its own life outside my research. However, this may raise an interesting question for this part of the thesis.

When a member of a group does not have enough ownership of the group’s activities to be able to discuss them with non-group members, what does that say about the ‘groupness’ of that group? As we already discussed above, using the term groupness (‘group’ + the suffix ‘-ness’) enables us to express that it is an abstraction: the condition of being in a group, not the actual fact of being in a group. And because of this I am not actually talking about the particular group. Instead, I am referring to the individual. Groupness suggests the feeling or sense of belonging so does not really require actual membership. However, if one is a member of a group, do different kinds of groups (e.g. in a secret society or a

professional association or a trade union or a fan club) lead to their feeling of different sorts of groupness?

It is, therefore, necessary for the thesis to have its own project to talk about the issue of introducing the groupness idea to other fine art practitioners. In Chapter Four I argued that there are different kinds of individuality: the kind of individuality that emerges from groupness has a distinct character from the kind of individuality that is entirely insular in origin. Given that there are different kinds of individuality, can we also talk about different kinds of groupness? So, my three case studies which are based on three different kinds of groupness situations are not intended to set up groups but attempts to observe whether there are different senses of groupness at work. They are group exhibitions of two different artists' groups and of those artists with no group background, and giving a group situation to students to see how different kinds of artists' groups work and how groupness functions in those situations. We shall look at them in turn. The focus of the sections will be a creation of different situations where they would consider their individuality other than the one based on their single individuality and an observation of the influence of the groupness idea on their practice.

6. 3. 1. Curatorial project 1

Title: *Members Only*: the artists group in contemporary Japan and Britain

Venue: Bailiffgate Museum, Alnwick, Northumberland

Date: 14 May - 3 July 2004

I curated this exhibition looking at two artists' groups: my own from Japan, the Ryu Art Group, and another from Britain, the Stuckists, in collaboration with Paul Harvey, a Newcastle member of the Stuckist group. The

exhibition was essentially a comparison between two *currently* active artists' groups with totally different cultural backgrounds and philosophies. The main aim was to find commonality within the difference for an analysis of their sense of groupness.

The Ryu Group was founded by the Japanese artist, Toshihiro Hamano, with his students in 1971 in Kagawa. Its purpose was to support local cultural development by creating an organized movement of energetic young local artists, who in the past, had tended to leave their hometown for the big cities like Tokyo. Hamano emphasizes that 'artists should not only develop their powers of self-expression but also use them to transcend the barriers of country and culture' (Hamano, 1998). Its members are all students of one leader and master, and their activities are based on trust and direct individual personal relationships built through their cultural exchange programmes within and outside of Japan.

The Stuckists originated in Kent in 1979 with a group called the Medway Poets. The name Stuckism was coined by Charles Thompson and was derived from a phrase in a poem by Billy Childish. In the poem, Childish used an insult made by his ex-girl friend, the celebrated artist Tracey Emin, that he was 'Stuck! Stuck! Stuck!' (Stuckism International) in his painting, poetry and music. In 1999, the Stuckists were finally founded by Charles Thompson and Billy Childish with twelve other artists (now known as the London Stuckists). The founding members encourage artists all over the world to establish their own Stuckist groups via their web site. They also receive a great deal of media attention which has promoted their cause. The Stuckists now have 202 groups in forty-eight countries and five Stuckist Centres worldwide.

The differences are striking and require little analysis to make the point that an artists group can be formed for a large number of personal and external, social purposes. With the two groups in question, the Stuckists

rebelled against the dominance of Conceptual Art as represented by critic-generated groupings such as the Young British Artists (mostly artists promoted by the art dealer Charles Saatchi), and the Ryu Group has tried to focus regional artists in their home location. In both cases there is an outstanding common feature: uniting in opposition to a perceived professional, and therefore cultural, deficiency.

This oppositional unity emerges within a divergence of approach, for example, the concept of a group manifesto. The Stuckists value their manifesto as a kind of tool to position themselves in relation to external opposing forces such as Conceptual Art; the Ryu Group do not. Under the leadership of their master Hamano, the Ryu membership holds together through an internal alliance in which artists encourage each other within a shared master-pupil relationship. A manifesto draws together artists who feel alienated by a restrictive contemporary situation. A master-pupil tradition structures the efforts of artists to build a visual arts culture in their immediate vicinity.³⁸

It is clear that the Stuckist manifesto is a political response to a particular historical moment (it will lose ground and relevance if the artists are accepted and drawn into the mainstream) and that the Ryu approach is a long-term investment in a socio-geographic location. The Stuckists have used their manifesto to develop an international context and the Ryu Group has utilized the art educational systems of several European countries to generate a series of Western outposts. Internationalism is, in this sense, a measure of the purpose and coherence for both groups.

³⁸ In explaining the relationship between Master and apprentices taught in a Buddhist sutra, *Singlovada-suttanta*, Nakamura states that apprenticeship in the ancient India was based on a live-in system and it was important for the apprentices served closely under their master (Nakamura, 2001). In Japan, live-in apprenticeship was major way of learning from the Edo period (*Koji-en*). Also, in the West '[ways of learning] in earlier times were always closely related the real work of professionals, tradesmen, artisans, independent scholars. In twentieth century, for instance, young people learned working beside masters [...]' (Alexander *et al.*, 1977).

Of course, because of the different cultural background, i.e. individual- and group-oriented, it is easy to assume that the difference between them can be explained within the framework of the contrasting forms of individuality discussed in Chapter Four. However, more importantly, the Ryu/Stuckist case study certainly draws out differences and similarity in the condition of groupness. As debated in the interview with Paul Harvey mentioned in the previous Chapter (page 115), both Harvey and I agreed that we strongly identify with our groups as artists and expressed an anxiety over losing it. What I have learnt through reflecting on the curatorial project is that although the two groups are both a group of artists, their objectives and how they are formed are very different. So we certainly feel groupness in the sense of belonging to and identifying with the groups. Does that mean that we feel different types of groupness? Coming back to the cultural difference again, the Stuckists seem to have a fairly Western attitude, being less restrictive about who is joining in and where they are (they have different branches in every corner of the world (Stuckist International) and I described this as an individualistic group in Chapter Five). Therefore it is assumed that their groupness is more vaguely felt than the Ryu membership which is based on a close master-pupil relationship.



continue...



Figure 38: *Members Only* exhibition at Bailiffgate Gallery, Alnwick

6. 3. 2. Curatorial project 2

Title: *Japan to Northumbria*

Venue: Gallery North, Northumbria University

Date: 5-19 December 2008



Figure 39: Invitation card (designed by Dan Wilde)

Japan to Northumbria was an experimental exhibition co-curated by one of my supervisors Chris Dorsett and myself to introduce the different and diverse dimensions of Northumbria University's past relationship with Japan, including the Ryu Group's history at the University. Those who took part in the group exhibition were Japanese students studying in the University (undergraduate and post-graduate), and British students who are interested in Japanese culture and participated in the School's *Japan Visit*³⁹ programme in 2008, as well as members of staff who used to work

³⁹ The programme took place at Kagawa Junior College (Kagawa, Japan) as part of the educational exchange programme organized by the School of Arts and Social Sciences

in Japan. The exhibition presented artworks put alongside explanatory panels of each of the different relationships.

This group exhibition, like the first curatorial project *Members Only*, may contrast between artists from different cultural and group backgrounds. This time, however, unlike the previous project where the comparison was made between the two artists' groups, the exhibition was designed to explore layers of different types of group within a bigger group. Not all the exhibitors belong to an artists' group as such. The only obvious connecting factor is their association with Japan within the scope of Northumbria University's relationship with the country. Each exhibitor has a different background or relationship which the group exhibition gathered together. For example, the exhibitors included Ryu students including myself, other Japanese students who chose to study at Northumbria without any association with a artists' group (but some of them are from different institutions such as Bunsai Art College in Tokyo and Japanese Photo-Therapy Network), British artists who were grouped as the 'Japan Group', due to their interest and involvement to the country. Some had taken part in the educational programme (*Japan Visit*), and the others had lived in the country.

at Northumbria, Kagawa College and the Ryu Art Group. (See Appendix 2 for more detail.)



Figure 40: Meeting with participants (photographed by Keith McIntyre)

Given what has been said above, different kinds of individuality and different kinds of groupness, this is the appropriate moment to consider layers of groupness and layers of individuality. In Chapter Five we discussed the different perceptions of artists in the West and Japan. The individual artist puts her/himself against the outside world (Nakamura, 1994), whereas for the Japanese artist, individuality refers 'to the personal experience of the world on which one is dependent' (Westgeest, 1996: 200). For instance, Sian Bowen, one of my supervisors and a tutor in the Visual Art Division, who has studied and exhibited in Japan (see Appendix 3 for details), is a very individualistic practitioner. The UK students who start with individuality as a core of their practice; they will try to do so even if it holds up cohesion and technical improvement. The Japanese students are much less like this. I assume although the participating Japanese students are more likely to be individualistic than I am because of their non-group background, they should feel more comfortable in giving up their individuality to the group. It was shown in the preparation process where the Japanese participants are more engaged. The outcome of the exhibition makes us wonder whether the exhibition actually communicated

any sense of groupness. In order for us to reach some answer to this question, we have to await further research into that strand to be developed.



continue...



Figure 41: *Japan to Northumbria* exhibition (photographed by Ikuko Tsuchiya and the author)

6. 3. 3. Teaching project: giving a group identity

Project description:

A teaching project for the Overseas Foundation Diploma Art and Design course (Visual Art Division, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Northumbria University) in collaboration with other PhD student John Lavell, which concluded with a one-day experimental exhibition project.

Title: 'Nostalgia: the Road Home'

Venue: Fourth Floor Gallery, Squires Building, Northumbria University

Date: 20 May 2009

As described above, my intervention in this action research is to create a groupness situation for other practitioners. I took part in the teaching team for the Overseas Foundation Diploma course in the Visual Art Division for the past few years as a part-time lecturer. Since the students studying in the course are international students, they presumably have less, or a different sense of, individuality, compared to the home students. The aim of this project in relation to my research is to see whether this group-based activity would lead to a stronger practice base of the individual student by giving the students an identity as a group: groupness situation. The students are treated as individuals and it is expected that they develop their own practice. But as they are from more group-oriented background it was considered enabling for them to develop their individuality as art practitioners.

This particular teaching project took place as a part of a module for the Diploma course in 2008/09 which culminated in a form of a student-led exhibition. During the year-long study, the students were expected to get equipped with both practical skills and the knowledge of art school culture, in preparation for study in an undergraduate degree course in a British art school. Similar to the undergraduate degree course modules mentioned in the Introduction (pages 9-10), they were expected to develop their

individual practice. Alongside their projects in different areas of practice in art and design (photography, interior design, animation, and printmaking) with specialised tutors, each student was given a specially designed assignment which suited their need to develop their knowledge and skills in their desired area of study. They were asked to produce annotated sketchbooks and drawings as well as final pieces to be exhibited. These were all designed for the students to develop an efficient portfolio as a preparation towards their interviews.

The above-mentioned activities are usually individually oriented practice. However, John Lavell and I set up a subsidiary project: a group-oriented practice which culminated in the form of a display of their work in an exhibition setting. Art students regularly exhibit their work, and it was good introduction for our students to be introduced to it. Importantly, we called the exhibition practice a group-oriented practice in order to give them a clear sense of their group identity. The students gave a theme to the exhibition (Nostalgia: the Road Home) and worked together (through regular meetings as well as the actual production of the exhibition) as a group to present their group identity in the exhibition.

It was most unfortunate that the number of students was very low in the year 2008/09⁴⁰, making it difficult to see their group dynamics work as well as I had originally hoped. However, looking at the other side of the coin of this situation, this seems to prove how important it is for each student's development to possess working group dynamics, and it was still a good opportunity to explore my topic with two Oriental students (from the Far East, though not from Japan), who are presumably group-oriented, in an individualistic environment. On the basis of my observations of what happened in this course, it is my next plan to establish a teaching module to help future Japanese (and other East Asian) students to really

⁴⁰ It was partly due to the stricter student visa procedure set by the British government, and partly due to some unforeseeable change of personal circumstances.

understand UK art school individuality and make the most of their own tradition of deriving individuality out of groupness. I can perhaps speculate that I am trying to establish a different form of individuality (one that British art schools do not really understand) for my future students. As a result of this teaching project, it became clear to me that teaching and learning strategies will be required to introduce these kinds of art students to a new area of the fine art discipline that could be, following the completion of my research, loosely described as 'group studies'.



Figure 42: Students discussing with John Lavell



continue...



Figure 43: *Nostalgia: the Road Home*: preparation (previous page) and the opening

6. 4. Conclusion to the thesis

Through my investigation into the meaning of being an individual, there emerged a practice-led methodology suitable, I believe, for individual art practitioners who are also members of artists' groups. This concluding Chapter has examined my creative practice in relation to this topic following the action research cycle of identifying an issue, designing an intervention that will address that issue, documenting the outcomes, reviewing the outcomes and disseminating the results, as described by Winch and Gingell (1999).

Firstly, in order to examine my individual practice I used the Co-operative Inquiry method (Heron and Reason, 2001) in which the group explored the relationship of my paintings to other aspects of my visual research. The artist-researchers' enquiry group provided greater confidence in my individual decision-making by establishing that more than one person linked the painting illustrated in Figure 31 to *Oxherding* image VIII. This introduced a form of objectivity into my subjective engagement with my work. Also, each of the group case studies had an impact on how I work in my studio.

Also, by setting up different groupness situations for other practitioners, my group-oriented practice was tested and documented. The Ryu-Stuckist curatorial project gave me a strong sense of how, despite cultural and political differences, formally inaugurated artists' groups reveal a counteractive dimension. One forms a group at this level because they perceive that something is wrong or missing. The exhibiting group developed around the curatorial theme of the Japan-Northumbria link, in bringing together resolutely insular UK artists with young, very group-oriented Japanese art students; this taught me things about the role of context in forming certain kinds of groupness where none would normally exist.

Lastly, my pedagogic interaction with the Overseas Foundation Diploma Art and Design has helped me understand the complexities of developing teaching programmes that support and promote groupness as a creative idea. This last experience allows us to speculate on the design of a module for a British art school that provides reflective and active knowledge of the concept of an artists' group. My proposition is that the Japanese philosophical and cultural dimension would be a key component in the syllabus design.

Today, the issue of individuality and the group is debated a great deal in books, television programmes and newspaper articles (see chapter 4 above). These debates seem very inconclusive to me and I believe that it is impossible to provide further resolution in a thesis on artists' groups but I hope that my research makes a contribution to knowledge and becomes a platform for other researchers. Many of the challenging ideas I address (Zen, Peirce, individuality, modernity, art and creativity, etc.) may require a thesis each to do them full justice in relation to my topic. There has not been enough time and I have not had the personal capacity to make a thorough study of those theories within the limits of space, time and words of this PhD. However, I hope, at least, they have been used in interesting and provocative ways by combining these ideas. In the end, my focus has been on the promotion of a practice-led approach to understanding the nature of artistic individuality and artists' groups.

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Appendix 1: Interview: Paul Harvey by Hiroko Oshima

Northumbria University

8 April 2009

(Transcribed by Jolande Bosch)

NOTE: Because of the informal nature of this conversation, it has been edited. Also, specific names (unless they are connected directly to the content of the research) have been taken out from the transcript. Italicization is used to indicate stressed expression.

[P: Paul Harvey, H: Hiroko Oshima]

H: [I would like to discuss] artist groups and advantage and disadvantage and problems and difficulties about [them]. At a personal level what is the inference of your being in a group for your practice? I mean, individual practice.

P: I think for me, being in a group has really helped because when I got back to painting seriously, well I have always painted, but I didn't start painting again seriously until about ten years ago. And when I started painting, and I really loved painting and I felt like I really knew what I was doing, but I kind of strayed away from art and I have been a musician for many years you know. So when I got back to kind of 'doing art' I did not really understand art and what I realised was, that with my first few paintings I was just doing it because I loved it and then I started thinking; yeah I like them, but they are not really art. I don't feel I have been putting art into it, and I did not know what that meant. And it was around that time where I did not really know what to do, that I read that article on the Stuckists and it just immediately resonated with me you know, what they were saying, the manifesto, the paintings, I just thought: that is what I am, I feel like they feel. So I got in touch with them and ended up kind of being part of the movement and actually it really focused what I was doing and it helped me understand what I was actually doing. And what I was trying to do was force art onto painting and that is never going to work, you know, forcing things. And Charles, particularly Charles Thomson, he said, it doesn't matter about art, just paint, just do what it is you do, do it authentically and it will work for you, it is expressing yourself. So for me it really helped me focus and also I found I learned much quicker from talking to other people ...

H: ... Who were sharing the same sort of ideas ...

P: Well, sharing ideas and sharing kind of philosophies and it really accelerated my learning. So that was certainly one of the positive things.

H: In my case it is slightly different because the founder of the group is my high school art teacher. But he got me into this art world. I always liked drawing and painting but he found some kind of talent in me and recommended to carry on studying art, so, it is like a student-teacher relationship bringing me into the group.

P: Well, it was a little bit like that for me, I don't think it, there is a lot of difference in my and your experiences in this, but I do see Charles as somebody that I respect for his ideas. He is very clever, very intelligent and you know I do kind of listen quite hard to what he says; it does make a lot of sense to me but I don't follow what he says religiously. It is not as if he tells me to do something, I do it. With Stuckism it is ... well for instance Stuckism has over a hundred groups worldwide, so how can you possibly control all that activity, you can't, even if you wanted to, but he doesn't want to because it is a very democratic process I think, Stuckism. I think the other thing about western art is that if say you, say

somebody decided to become a Stuckist, and you started saying: “I am a Stuckist”, there is nothing we could do about that. We can’t say; well actually you are not a Stuckist because you are not doing what we say and you are not [...] do you know what I mean?

H: That is very interesting, it is very different from my experience.

P: Well, yeah, because you can’t stop people from calling themselves Surrealist or Expressionists.

H: No.

P: So we can’t actually stop people from calling themselves Stuckists. In the end, it doesn’t even really matter, you know, people can call themselves what they want. So the group is actually incredibly independent and we don’t really control ...

H: You mean, have smaller groups? I mean, that Stuckism is a movement.

P: It is a movement, yes.

H: And you have smaller units.

P: Yes, lots of smaller groups. Originally the Stuckist movement was founded by Charles Thomson and Billy Childish and the original, what we’ll call London Stuckists, I think there was about ten of them, so that was the core group. But that has been quite a loose arrangement because people have left, people have argued and left.

H: That happens.

P: Yes, other people have come...

H: ...leaving is another thing.

P: And now there isn’t even such a thing as the London Stuckists, there is more a group of core Stuckists and Charles [...], he just decides who gets the most coverage and the most wall space in exhibitions, but I think that really is due to two things. It is not how much he can control them, it is more about how good he thinks the work is, but also it is about who puts in effort. Who is willing to drive the van around with paintings in it, who is willing to work on a show, who is willing to do some promotion. So it is really good in that way too. What Charles likes to do is he likes to reward people that work hard for the cause, because, certainly there is work gone in shows that he does not like, but he doesn’t see that as important. What he says is important is that people that are committed are represented. So it really doesn’t bother him if there is work in that he doesn’t like.

H: Yes I think that from what I have read and studied, I think that is based on a Western European idea of ...

P: Well, I think outwardly it is, but both Billy and Charles are very involved in Eastern Philosophy and religion, I don’t know what you would call it actually, whether it is philosophy or religion, but Charles is a follower of Kabala. Not the

celebrity Madonna-type Kabala, but [...] the real thing. Billy practices yoga every day for instance and meditation. Charles talks about a spirit guide who [...] helps him make decisions in his life so outwards it may seem very western in the way we sell ourselves and the publicity, it is a very western media savvy [...] approach and its core though is a much more spiritual, holistic set of beliefs really.

H: Do you think that influenced these two founders to set up this group, because of this Eastern influence?

P: Well, I don't know whether influenced to do it, but there is certainly an influence in the manifestos. If you read the manifestos, because there is the Stuckist manifesto and there is the Remodernist manifesto, they were both written about the same time. And if you look at those carefully and if you know your Eastern philosophies, which I don't, but this, all the way through, it is about spirituality. It is about stages of enlightenment, it is about knowing yourself, it is about the quest for authenticity. The Stuckists say that the truth is the truth no matter what you want it to be so I heard an interview with Charles actually in which he talks quite specifically about points in the manifesto are based on Buddhist, kabala, philosophies and ideas so I can always send you that as well because that might be useful to you. So there is certainly- I don't think it influenced them to actually do it, but in the ideas there is a big influence I would say, yes. Which people don't really understand, [because] they don't look hard enough for it.

H: They just look at the surface.

P: They look at the surface all the time, they look at the way we promote ourselves and they just see us as a bunch of bitter people who are angry and want to be famous and things like that and that is why we create publicity but it is very far from that, actually we really believe in what we are doing.

H: So we can't generalize the reasons why we join a group, but in your case it was like establishing yourself as an artist, or...

P: Well, I am not the kind of person to join a group. I have joined a group, I suppose you could say that punk rock was a group of a sort and I did become involved in that, but, I was very young, I was sixteen, seventeen, I just loved the music and it seemed the right thing to do, but since the age of sixteen and forty-two or whatever, I never got involved in anything, I have always been very suspicious of groups. So certainly the reason wasn't because I was lonely or I wanted to meet people or, it wasn't a social thing. It was very much about a set of beliefs that I identified with, and it kind of excited me and that is why I joined them. I certainly didn't think about that this is an opportunity to hang on to somebody else's coattails and that they can drag me along to success. That's the last thing it was. In fact, when I look back at the things I have done as an individual through the years, and when [...] things started happening for me in different areas, I have tended to lose interest or [...] pulled away from them, so, in some ways it has always been the opposite, I have always shied away from success or recognition, so it certainly wasn't that. It really was about believing in what they were saying and understanding what they were saying. It is so rare, in the art world, for someone to be speaking or writing and I just totally identified, because it is such an academic or pretentious environment to be working in, you

know, so that is really what it was for me. I mean do you feel like you were, like, forced into becoming part of the movement, or...

H: ... right, not for me, it was. I was very, very young when I started, I was eighteen, I didn't know what I was doing. I was going to start my art school and then, because I looked at [...] people ahead of me joining the group, and doing different things, like exhibiting and teaching things and organizing stuff. And I was simply just interested in that and although I was studying in this Art School I always felt that it was my home, you know, the group. Something to come back to, although we have different influences and interests, so, we always come back to this, work together, I mean. So like yourself I wasn't after any recognition being part of it doesn't bring me... I don't think it will bring me anything like that. But this kind of working method suits me [...] the working together thing, although it has been always been important for me to produce my own work in relation to the group.

P: So would you say all your work represents the group, or do you ... or put forward as part of the group?

H: Well, my paintings, all of us in the group have different kind of products and we don't particularly present our paintings as 'this is group work' although we sometimes have group exhibitions, we are still different artists with maybe different beliefs, you know, and approach...

P: What is the role of your leader in that group?

H: He has always been a mentor for me.

P: But could you put an exhibition on without having to tell him what work you put in if you were representing the group?

H: We always consult with him.

P: Does he want that?

H: Yes, I think so, we expect, our expectation is that.

P: I think that is where it is very different.

H: Yes, I think it is very Japanese style, sometimes hierarchical.

P: Does that not frustrate you or do you like it being like that?

H: Sometimes, but, and it is not for everyone, I saw many people who left. But for me as a practitioner, it suits me, so that is why I am still here [...] with the group.

P: You must have a lot of respect for him, or is there any time that you question his judgement, or his ideas, do you ever question him?

H: Sometimes, we, because although I am still in a group, I am here in England, and I learned a lot, different ideas. It is very different from what I knew before, so the influence is huge, but I respect him as an artist, he is a great artist. He practices constantly, so I don't mind listening to [him]. If he is a leader only by

name and doesn't do anything...I would [question him], but he is a respectful practitioner.

P: Because, you see, what is interesting about the Stuckists is that Charles Thompson has been accused of being a sinister leader and being part of a cult and we are being brainwashed, which is very interesting, that people kind of have that opinion it shows real ignorance. I can see where it comes from, I can see why people think that, but that's just because he is very good in discussions. Someone who can speak There is no kind of real control there, so it is quite interesting to me that I would be considered by some people to be brainwashed into believing in a set of ideas and you know.

H: For me, this is the point of my thesis. Although being in a group, it is not the group that keeps me going, but the feeling of belonging to something and learning from it is part of my practice.

P: Well definitely the same with me as well, I feel the same. I think that if I didn't feel I was learning anything from Stuckism anymore, I would just leave it. The other thing with me though, the other reason I like being in a group or movement, whatever you call it, is that it is a lot of fun...

H: Yes, it is.

P: ... and I enjoy it, it is fun, it is a laugh and I really enjoy it. I mean if it were serious all the time, well it is serious but I mean if it was [...] without humour or interest or if it was just a either a kind of purely intellectual experience or the kind of experience just trying to promote yourself, than I would not be interested in it. It works for me because I get a lot of fun out of it.

H: Well you know, in terms of recognition and fame and so on, I think it is you, you have to do your bit, you have to work hard, it is up to you really. But to do something together makes me feel alive, really and [...] a visual art practice is kind of a lonely activity you know, stuck in a studio, painting, talking to yourself all the time.

P: Yes, true ...

H: And I mean it is basically it, artistic practice, but I have participated a lot in organising exhibitions in Europe and I saw many people who I couldn't have imagined meeting, since I have been working alone...

P: same with me yes ...

H: So it is like having multiple eyes and brains.

P: Have you ever thought that being part of a group might be just a safety net? What I mean is that you feel that if you were left on your own, if you were totally on your own, that you wouldn't be able to deal with it perhaps? This is something I think about, you know.

H: Sometimes I feel like that, imagine that, because my practice and my life is so involved with the group. So suddenly if it disappears I would feel like I am not safe, I will feel like that I think.

P: Off course, and your work would probably change as well, this is what I am doubtful about as well. Is it? how?... First of all I have thought about, how different would my work be now if I had never just emailed that day to the Stuckists after reading that interview, just how would it be? And I think it would be [...] nowhere near as good in [...], the way I look at it. But also I think, well I have done this, I have learned, and I listened to people, and I got a lot out of it, how would it be if I now left and just be totally on my own? Would it get better in another way? Would I feel free of the burden of it? You know? So I do often, think about it, but you can't do everything...

H: No that is the point for me, you have to choose...

P: You can't experience everything. Playing in a band for instance, when you are on stage, playing in a big venue, you're one of only four people in that room that can't experience what it is actually like, because you're on stage and the sound is different and what you actually want is to be in the audience to hear what it sounds like and you're on stage thinking: it sounds all right on stage but I wonder what it really sounds like with all the ambience and the volume and things like that and I have realized that if I want to play in this particular band, this is one particular band where I will never really know what it sounds like... and so it is easier for me to not think about 'I wonder what my work could be like if I just left the group and just worked as an individual artist'. I wonder, but it is not a big issue for me, I don't think. But yeah, you certainly, you can't experience everything.

H: Sometimes, you know, art is free and rebellious and challenge the existing values and so on, but it seems that those criteria or trades seem to against any group, it seems this direction, like you said, burden, seems like that. But I don't particularly feel like they are so against each other ...

P: Well, no I don't think so, I think if a movement or a set of ideas is a good set of ideas, there is more than enough room to express yourself within that, in fact, one of the criticisms of Stuckism is that there is no style, everybody's work looks different. But actually that is a good thing, because if everybody's work looked the same, than there'd be something wrong. Because we are all individuals with our own individual take. So I have never really kind of, I think that is an important point to, like, look at, because I don't think certainly within Stuckism that is a problem, in fact, Stuckism encourages you to find your own way to do what it is you do.

H: It is the same with us.

P: It is not a kind of dogma that says you have to use oil paint or you have to glaze or anything. It does say that you should do figurative painting, but I think that is a fairly wide idea, figurative painting, when you think about all the different, you know. All we, what we are interested in is painting pictures. People have always painted pictures. I wouldn't say that's particularly restrictive, and when you go to a Stuckist show you will realize that it is not restrictive at all and that the variety of work and the technique, it is huge. I think it also, in the history in the arts since modernism anyway, there is a traditionalist movement, there is a tradition of people getting together and writing manifestos. And when you look at those movements like Dada, Surrealism and Futurism, they are probably a little

bit more restrictive than Stuckism when I look at them, you know, Stuckism is kind of really... It is very open to ideas and to the individual approach, whereas, it is kind of like Stuckism as an idea, as a wholeness is not just about being expressing, not just about the conscious or just about the subconscious, it is about everything together, where as Realism or Dada talked about the subconscious all the time, but Stuckism believes that is only half the story. If you look into Jung and Freud and those kind of people it is not looking at one area to find the truth. It is about looking at a few areas and I think Stuckism does that, so, you know for me it's widened my opportunities as a practitioner, not restricted it. No one tells me what to do, what kind of paintings to do, I mean you do, someone would say to you: I really like that painting you did, that's very good. But they won't tell you that you must do more of those, and stop doing those, it is not like that at all.

H: But you know, we talk about, as an artist group, we talk about each other's work, whether you are in a group or not, you know. And it is important for the practice, talking about our work.

P: So when you are working on a piece of work, are you thinking to yourself; is this a... does this reflect the ideas of the group? Is it the right kind of thing or does it not come into your mind at all and do you just produce work and worry about it later?

H: I don't, because we don't have a style whatsoever in the group, I just paint what I want to paint. But because he has, my teacher, the group leader, he has been always my art teacher, I always think back and what he said to me, in terms of my work. I in a basic level, not like, you know my expression or ...

P: So you don't find that restrictive at all, or is it a good thing, do you think; oh, he said that at that time, [...] I think, certain things because you could argue that there is a weakness in that relationship with him, because he was so much your kind of superior because he first kind of forged a relationship with you when he was your teacher, and a teacher is in a powerful position, and I know that, because I am a teacher and I know how much power I have over my students. And as a teacher you try and work ethically and you try not to abuse that unequal relationship too much and so I don't know, I don't know whether you thought about that or not, but it is, a relationship between student and teacher that can be exploited. For instance, you are working at a very high level now, you are doing a PhD. He is, has he ever done a PhD?

H: No.

P: So you're actually working, in terms of education, at a higher level than him. So that relationship in some way, has tipped the other way, whereas you could argue that you are now here and he is now here [gestures]. You see what I mean?

H: Right.

P: But you would never think that ...

H: No.

P: But it is something worth considering.

H: Well, I always ... it is part of my culture, Japanese culture.

P: Exactly.

H: Not so much the group, but we always respect the older people.

P: I am the opposite you see, when Punk Rock said don't respect your elders, they don't know anything, because they exploit you, because they use you, so I have never had that and I don't think kind of Western ideas are like that, I can see where you come from, it's about respect and all that, but you have to look at that you know.

H: Well, that is the point, he is frustrated as well, because his students – us – always respect him, but, we are like too quiet for him, he wants things to happen, suggested by us. We have different experiences, so after doing a PhD, it is a top level degree, I am qualified to do, at least, create a lot of research. So I can give something back to the group. But he thinks we are not doing that a lot.

P: Well that's interesting, because perhaps he is not giving you the opportunity, emotionally, to do that. Because on one hand he is saying: I am in charge and I am the master or he leader and I have the final say on everything and I am this kind of important figure that you should all look up to, but then he is saying, I want you to have different Ideas and come up with different things, but that is kind of difficult, because if you feel the weight of that 'mastery' all the time.

H: Yes, but the master-pupil relationship is always there, but he ...

P: ... whereas Charles, you see, he is Stuckism, he is the total, he runs it, it's his idea, he is Stuckism, but he is, it is not the same, he is wanting all the time to be questioned, he wants people to do their own things, he is wanting people to come along with their own ideas and to put on shows and, do you see what I mean? It is not the same thing. But perhaps you need someone to be really in charge, to set rules...

H: Well, he, my master, doesn't think that he has to control everything. He is just the core of something, you know, keeping everything together, but he might think; well you have different experience from me, but because of our culture it is more difficult to say something to him, but I don't think it is his philosophy or policy to control everything.

P: You think that your culture is something that gets in the way, or again, do you think it is the right way to do things?

H: I appreciate it in a way, it gives you some sort of, not 'order', but...

P: I know what you mean.

H: I don't like the word 'order'.

P: No, but your boundaries are very clearly defined, are they? And they are, you are sitting within a ... I understand that.

H: Yes, I always want to respect people and being rebellious can be not always respectful of somebody.

P: Yes, well I am not saying we have the same thing, because we are talking about the difference between your culture and ours, but, we have had for years this class system, of which I am not saying that it is the same, it is the same but different, but, it was always kind of, it still is kind of rigid actually. There was always this idea where the working class man had to always kind of doff his cap to the man further up in the class system. And that changed kind of when Labour first came to power and we, the working class, which I kind of am, were encouraged to question the motives of the belief system that these people from a higher class were imposing on us from above. So I think, you know, there is a little bit more of the kind of question all the time. And certainly Punk Rock has taught me that; to question all the time, to question your betters, to question your elders, to question the people that were higher in class than you and don't accept the system. You know, so there is a little bit more of the rebellious with us, which I kind of always have been part of, and I suppose in Japanese culture that is probably not ... I think is, do the young question their elders now? Is there any rebellious streak there?

H: Young people are always rebellious I think, but I don't know. Well, our society is maybe one of the most egalitarian, because we don't have a class system, we don't have classes. But in terms of judgments as well, maybe it is a Christian tradition, you kind of are independent but you ask, you talk to the god, for judgment; is it good or not? But in Japan we don't have the religious belief, we don't have god, and we kind of ask your neighbour, you know the person next to you, for judgment. I think that is another thing.

P: In a way that is much more healthy than Christianity and those kinds of ideas, where you are talking to someone and they are not really there you know, that is weird isn't it? So, yeah, in a lot of ways I can understand [...]. There are a lot of people who would say, in this country for instance, if we had more respect for our elders, that we would have a much better society. I mean respect is really a big issue at the moment in British society, you know. And certainly we are not a very healthy society, there is no doubt about that.

H: Well, Japan neither; we have a lot of problems.

P: On the surface it is kind of healthy, but underneath it is kind of different isn't it?

H: It is, our society has been always group based. You talk to the person next to you, but because of the economic crisis and everything, that kind of system is collapsing. They are talking about being more individualistic. So it is an interesting time for me, to think of this individual-group relationship. It is very big and I can't do anything, but as an artist ...

P: I think overall we must like working in groups, because otherwise we wouldn't do it. I mean I believe you when you say 'I am not doing it because I think it might get me further on', and I am, certainly for me it is the same reason, I guess you would just have to believe me that for me, it is not a career move, it was never a career move for me, it was never an opportunity for kind of success. It was a

creative opportunity and that is how I have always made my decision. So we must like it, in the end.

H: Well maybe it is partly our personality to be in a group.

P: Yeah, but also I have quite a romantic idea. I like how in Paris in the nineteen hundreds, there was all these creative people that sat around, drinking coffee or drinking absinth and talking about art and talking about ideas and philosophies and talking late into the night and staying up the whole night having this bohemian kind of lifestyle. I make no bones about that, I like that idea, so any opportunity I have to do that I will do it, so that is certainly part of it with me is, I like the romantic idea of it. But it is not quite the same when you are doing it in Whitley Bay, you know, but it is still... When I go down to, I go down to London quite a lot and when I stay I stay in hotels in Bloomsbury and they are a lot more expensive but I just like the atmosphere in Bloomsbury so I am willing to spend more money to be able to feel more like that kind of person. And to walk around the British Museum and go to the National Gallery and do all that kind of things and kind of go to different galleries and meet different kinds of people and you don't have to be in a group to do that kind of things, but it's fun, but it is certainly that romantic. I will quite happily admit it. I don't think that is a bad thing...

H: No, I think everybody does that, in art school, all of us do that, you know.

P: Exactly, I say to my art students, if they are not making the most of being an art student. I say 'you're an art student, it is the best thing to be isn't it, you should be bringing your portfolio in everyday and you should want people to know you are an art student', but they don't see it that way it is quite strange you know. When I was an art student I felt like it was a special thing, we weren't doing sociology or history or whatever, we were like an art student, it was great.

H: And it is also, like, from outside too. When I was preparing to go to the art school my class mates, all of them told me, admiring, 'god you are doing art!'

P: Well, exactly.

H: You know, for me it felt like, well, I like it so I am doing it, so it is nothing so special that I like it so I want to do it.

P: Well things have changed, you see, if you look at the current crop of British artists that are successful like Damien Hirst, Tracey and all those people, and they are quite ruthless they are careerist. They see art as a lucrative career, I really think that, and I think that young artists look at that and they don't see it as a kind of philosophical experience, or a rewarding kind of creative experience, they see it as an opportunity, and I think that is what has changed, you know, everything is an opportunity now and it is about being successful and making money. And there has always been that element within the arts, but it is more so than ever now I think, in this country anyway. It's seen as an opportunity and that kind of doing it just for the love of doing it, has taken a little bit of a back seat and I think the Stuckists see that and they want to celebrate that and they, one of the points in the manifesto says that the success of the Stuckists is to get up in the morning and paint, you know. It is not about selling a piece of work. It is not about getting your picture in the paper, it is about getting up in the morning and doing some painting, and that is success. And it also celebrates the idea of the

amateur, you know, the amateur that does it for the love of it. Which is very far away from the Damien Hirst and the Sarah Lucas's and you know the Antony Gormleys of this world.

H: Yes, being famous ... Do you have any literature you can recommend about that?

P: Well, there are a lot of books that I have been reading, there [are] lots of books, it is not really about being in a group, or movement in terms of art, it's being in a group or movement in terms of music. So I have been reading a lot of sub culture books, you know, about kind of subcultures, whether it's the punks or the skins or the hippies, things like that. So I've read a lot of those, and I have read very little actually of being part of a group in art, I've suddenly realized that perhaps I should be...

H: Actually, I couldn't find, I haven't been able to find ...

P: Perhaps there isn't a lot of stuff out there, it is so accepted, that movements happen that no one seems bothered to write about...

H: No. Like individuality in art, creativity in art, they are so taken for granted, I can not find books about those.

P: Well the books that I have been reading in art are books that talk about contemporary art, kind of anti-conceptual art, and anti-Brit art and so on. I have read a lot of those books and then I have read about the state of contemporary art in kind of like the sixties and seventies, but none of these books actually mention being part of groups although groups are always formed, or movements are always formed. I don't know. It is interesting actually. I think there is a lot of literature about, you know there is on the Surrealist movement and how people were thrown out of it for not believing in the right thing or for not doing the right kind of work and you know. So there is stuff out there, but it is like, for instance, doing the PhD, you can't look too widely. I've got to concentrate really, just on Stuckism, and nothing of any academic worth has been written on Stuckism yet, so I feel like the first person doing it, but I think it is an interesting point. I think there probably should be more books thinking a little bit about that, about people's experiences of working within a group.

H: So, in terms of artist groups, there are art history books about movements, 'isms' and so on, I am not that interested in that.

P: Well, the thing is, those books are usually written by...

H: Historians

P: Yes, and not practitioners. So you get like, you get some information about how these groups work, but the most interesting thing for us is how it works as a practitioner. And how it felt as an artist in there. I am not someone outside looking in, so, in fact we can, if people say you haven't read this book, you haven't read that book, we can say well they are not relevant to us, because we are practitioners. But I think that is a really important point, isn't it?

H: I appreciate that there is a lot of literature about movements and groups, but there hasn't been anything prominent written about the artist's experience really.

P: I think when artists write they tend to concentrate very much just on themselves.

H: That is it, isn't it?

P: And they are always looking to build up their own story. So if you read the book written by Dali, for example, he will be the master of Surrealism, he will be the greatest Surrealist ever, he will be the greatest artist that ever lived. There won't be a little balance in there, you know. Because a lot of those people just had big egos you know, so it is quite hard to get to the truth of something, I think. So in the end a lot of that stuff is kind of a bit meaningless to us.

H: Maybe that is a good point to mention in my thesis.

[Conversation continued. However, after this point, the conversation went onto irrelevant issues to the thesis. Therefore, I make this the end of the transcript.]

Appendix 2: *Members Only* exhibition
Group exhibition of the Stuckists & Ryu Art Group

(Exhibition display boards)

Co-curated with Paul Harvey

Bailiffgate Museum, Alnwick

14 May - 3 July 2004

Introduction

As a member of the artists' group, Ryu Group, my interest has always been what impact artists groups have on the creative individual. Does an artists group encourage one to conform to the majority, and, as a result, will it be an obstacle to one's own creativity?

This exhibition looks at two artists' groups. One from Japan, the Ryu Art Group, and another from Britain, the Stuckists. The exhibition is a comparison between two currently active artists' groups with totally different cultural backgrounds and philosophies. The outcome will give us a clearer view of the nature of artists groups.

History of two groups

Stuckists

The Stuckists originated in North Kent in 1979 with a group called the Medway Poets. The core members have been working together since that date when their basic ideas were formulated.

Tracey Emin became part of the circle in 1982.

The name Stuckism was coined by Charles Thompson and was derived from a phrase in a poem by Billy Childish. In the poem, Childish used an insult made by his ex-girl friend Tracey Emin that he was “Stuck! Stuck! Stuck!” in his painting, poetry and music.

The Stuckists were founded by Charles Thompson and Billy Childish in 1999 with twelve artists.

The Stuckists demonstrated dressed as clowns against the Turner Prize for three years —because they felt it had turned into a circus.

Stuckism has gained worldwide media attention and much news coverage in this country. It is defined as one of the ‘key styles’ of Modern Art in *Styles, Schools and Movements* (Amy Dempsey, Thames and Hudson 2001)

Charles Thompson stood in the 2001 General Election as a Stuckist candidate in Islington against the then Culture Minister Chris Smith.

Co-founder Billy Childish left the group amicably in 2001 to concentrate on his own work.

Ella Guru started the Stuckist web site. Stuckism is the first major art movement to be spread via the internet.

There are now eighty Stuckist groups and five Stuckist centres worldwide.

There will be a major show titled *The Stuckists Punk Victorian* at the Walker Gallery, the Lady Lever Gallery and the Liverpool Museum as part of Liverpool Biennial Sept- Nov 2004.

(Extract from the Pocket Guide to Stuckism)

Ryu Art Group

The Ryu Group was founded by the artist, Toshihiro Hamano in 1971 in Kagawa, Japan. It's purpose was to support local cultural development by creating an organized movement of energetic young local artists who had tended to leave their hometown for the big cities like Tokyo.

Sakaide Civic Art Museum was founded in 1985, following fund-raising campaigns by Hamano and his group. Since then the Group has organised many exhibitions at the Museum.

In 1984, the Group's first exhibition abroad was held in Ljubljana in the Republic of Slovenia. Since then, Hamano and the Ryu have had exhibitions in cities all over Europe.

The relationship between Hamano and the Ryu Group and the UK began in 1991 when they were invited to exhibit, Zen: Hamano and Ryu, in Sunderland and Edinburgh, as part of the Japan Festival 1991 held throughout the UK to introduce Japanese culture.

In 1995 in association with Northumbria University, Hamano designed a Japanese garden named the Shared Moon Garden at the Westlakes Research Institute in Cumbria.

In 1996, the University conferred on Hamano the honorary degree, DCL, and the Ryu Art Centre, within the School of Arts and Social Sciences (SASS) in Northumbria was established. Since then, the Ryu Group has conducted several projects in co-operation with the University.

In 1997, the first group of students with Hamano's recommendation started their study of fine art at Northumbria University. During the past 7 years, there 10 students have graduated and 5 students are studying within the SASS.

What is an artists group?

Does each artist have to share the same objectives?
Should they aim to generate art movements?
Are they as much social as artistic influences?

The Stuckists

“Your paintings are stuck, you are stuck! Stuck! Stuck! Stuck!”
Tracey Emin

Stuckism is a philosophy derived from Buddhism and Kabbalah and it stresses the value of seeking truth, integrity, emotional engagement, vision and communication. Stuckism is the radical international art movement for contemporary figurative painting with ideas. It purports to oppose the pretensions of conceptual art. It is anti-anti-art. It is the first Remodernist art group. (Pocket Guide to Stuckism)

Ryu Art Group

The word Ryu signifies a wing flapping in the wind and conveys the sense of bird rising ever higher in the sky. It also implies the wish that no matter how far apart we may be, we should continue to influence one another, calling to each other from far and wide.

Hamano emphasises that “artists should not only develop their powers of self-expression but also use them to transcend the barriers of country and culture.”

Members: Who are they?

Stuckists: the founding members encouraging artists all over the world to establish their own Stuckist groups via the Media and their website.



Members demonstrated dressed as clowns against the Turner Prize for three years. The Tate Britain, December 2003

Ryu: members are all students of one leader and master, and their activities are based on trust and encouraged by direct and intimate individual personal relationships through their international cultural exchange programmes.



Members working for a garden project in collaboration with Northumbria University at Wansbeck Hospital, Ashington, 2003.

Appendix 3: *Japan to Northumbria* exhibition

(Exhibition display boards)

Co-curated with Chris Dorsett

Gallery North, Northumbria University

5-19 December 2008

Japan to Northumbria

Over the past fifteen years the Division of Visual Arts has established a range of cultural and educational links with artists and art institutions in Japan. Most notably these include partnerships with Professor Toshihiro Hamano and the Ryu Art Group, Kagawa Junior College in Utazu and Bunsai Art College in Tokyo. This has brought many excellent Japanese students to Northumbria and opened up exciting opportunities such as the Sakaide Art Grand Prix (a prestigious competition and public exhibition established by the Ryu Art Group) to which the University's students submit artworks annually.

Japan to Northumbria highlights different aspects of the exchange between the Division and Japan by exploring the individual and institutional initiatives that have helped create the present health of the interaction. It is our aim to celebrate these projects and draw attention to the extraordinary potential of the Japan-Northumbria exchange programme.

Throughout the Art and Design sector there has been rapid internationalization of British art schools. At Northumbria the long-standing connection with Japan has been central to a broadening of the cultural base for undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Fine Art. As a result, the interaction of British and Japanese artists now informs every level of the Division's activities, from staff and PhD research to summer school projects.

In the 90s the initial links were fostered by Reay Atkinson, Joe Earle, Professor Kenneth McConkey, Professor Gerda Roper, Professor Marie Conte-Helm and David Gray. In recent years, the Division's engagement with Japan has been developed and extended by Professor Lynn Dobbs, Craig Moore, Tim Johnson, Keith McIntyre, Chris Dorsett and Sian Bowen.

Exhibition Team

Curators: Chris Dorsett, Hiroko Oshima

Gallery interns: Ken Wilkes, Michelle Goulder, Lottie Curry

The early story: Toshihiro Hamano and the Ryu Art Group

The relationship between Northumbria University and the Ryu Art Group began in the early 90s when the group's founder, Toshihiro Hamano, met Reay Atkinson, Chair of the University's Trustees, during the 1991 Japan Festival. By 1994 Hamano and the Group were developing projects in association with the University. For example, an important commission from Westlakes Scientific Consulting placed a Japanese garden at their Research Institute in Cumbria.

Two years later the University conferred an honorary degree on Hamano and a centre for the group was established within the Fine Art division with the aim of promoting an exchange of academic and research ideas between the University's artists and members of the Group in Japan. In addition, the Ryu Centre at Northumbria became the Group's European headquarters and, to this end, a network of contacts was set up in Poland and Slovenia where Hamano had established links with the academies of fine art in Krakow and Ljubljana.

Hamano and the Ryu artists have continued to collaborate with Northumbria on garden and exhibition projects and a long-standing educational relationship has developed over the years. So far fifteen members of the Group have completed undergraduate and postgraduate degrees at Northumbria. Important contributions to this process have been made by Takayuki Nagai and Michihiro Onishi who led the Ryu Centre for its first eight years. At present, two members, Hiroko Oshima and Sachiyo Goda, are undertaking practice-led doctoral research within the Visual Arts Division.



Toshihiro Hamano performance work
at Northumbria University 1995

Nobuko Hamano and Kagawa Junior College

Nobuko is a Professor in Visual Media Design at Kagawa Junior College and a Visiting Fellow in the School of Arts and Social Sciences at Northumbria University. In 1999 Nobuko was an artist in residence at this University and at Edinburgh College of Art. With David Gray she pioneered the annual Japanese Summer School that has now evolved into the *Art School: Language and Culture* programme.

Kagawa College, with its newly added Media Course, has the largest art department in Kagawa Prefecture. Students take classes in conventional art subjects as well as manga, web animation and Computer Aided Design. The College has its campus near the north coast of the island of Shikoku situated in the south west of Japan. From the windows of the College's building you can enjoy view of the Seto Inland Sea with the magnificent Seto Ohashi Bridge.



Each year Kagawa students participate in the Sakaide Art Grand Prix which takes place at the Sakaide Civic Art Museum near the College. This is an exciting opportunity because the exhibition is an established gateway to success for young artists in the region as well as a chance to exhibit alongside artists from England, Poland, and Slovenia.

Japan to Northumbria features work by Shoji Matsumoto who was a student at Kagawa College and a participant in the 2004 Summer School programme at Northumbria. Shoji played a pivotal role in the success of both the *Art School: Language and Culture* in 2007 and the Japan Study Trip to Kagawa College in 2008.

Sakaide Art Grand Prix 2009

For the past five years Northumbria students have participated in the Sakaide Art Grand Prix, an international art competition held in Sakaide City, Kagawa. These events provide the students with a unique opportunity to exhibit in Japan and, in order to support Northumbria's involvement, the Division covers cost of postage.

Past prize winners from Northumbria:

2004 Joe Clark
2005 Michel Vincent Doocey
2006 Sarah Laws
2007 Ruth Woods
2008 Padraig Lynch

This year's details:

Exhibition date: 26th April –10th May 2009

Venue: Sakaide Civic Art Gallery

Judges:

Ichiro Haryu (art critic)

Toshihiro Hamano (Honorary Member of the International Print Triennial Society, Krakow)

Judging date: 10th April 2009 (award ceremony 25th April)

Awards:

Grand Prix (1 work)	¥500,000 (£2500)
2 nd Award (2 works)	¥100,000 (£500) each
3 rd Award (3works)	¥50,000 (£250) each



Bunsai Art College

Bunsai Art College, now part of Japan College of Foreign Languages, is situated in Takadanobaba, Tokyo. They offer a course very similar to a traditional UK art school Foundation Year, but supplemented with English Language lessons. This is specifically aimed at preparing Japanese art students for study in British Art Schools. The students who have come to Northumbria from Bunsai have a clear understanding of the character and potential of art education in the UK. Three Bunsai graduates are currently studying in the Visual Arts Division: Tomoya Akamine, Junichi Amano, and Motomi Yasuda.

As a representative of the Division, Keith McIntyre has made two visits to Bunsai Art College to interview students, give presentations and run workshops. The photographs below show Keith's participatory drawing workshops in which Bunsai students were asked to take on the character of a super hero whilst the class made drawings.



Japan Study Trip

In May 2008 a study visit to Kagawa College took place. This opportunity was a development of the School's research partnership with the Ryu Art Group and followed the reorganization of the Kagawa summer school by Chris Dorsett, Nobuko Hamano and Hiroko Oshima. Six Visual Arts undergraduates travelled to Japan: Huw Dampney, Alice Feaver, Penny Grennan, Gail Horgan, Helen Smith and Dan Wilde. They participated in calligraphy and manga classes, took part in flower arranging workshops and a tea ceremony as well as visiting a celebrated paper-maker and the famous temples in Kagawa and Kyoto. The Study Trip culminated in an exhibition of the student's work in Kagawa College. In addition, there was a group exhibition that included pieces by the Northumbria students at Gallery Kaze, Marugame, Kagawa.



Maiko Kobayashi

Maiko studied on the MA Art Practice Course 2007/8

This photograph was taken at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Arts. It shows the celebrated Japanese artist Yoshitomo Nara with the ten Northumbria students who worked with him as volunteers whilst he was installing his exhibition. The experience was very fruitful for Maiko whose approach to painting has been influenced by Nara. She had not met the artist before and was delighted to find herself treated like a collaborator rather than a gallery assistant. This was a special moment in Maiko's year of postgraduate study.



Art School: language and culture

Art School: Language and Culture is a unique learning experience which has been created to improve visual and verbal communication skills through studio practice – the course has been developed by Chris Dorsett, Nobuko Hamano, Kevin Parker (Modern Languages, Northumbria University) – these specialists help each student achieve their creative goals, critically review their learning experience, and shape their educational ambitions through the language and culture of British art schools.

Week one: getting started with studio learning

Two days working alongside British art students at the University's Newcastle campus followed by a three-day residency in rural Northumberland at Featherstone Castle (11th Century) using the Castle's historic studio and grounds – carefully designed projects help each participant understand the conversational and practical skills required by creative and productive artist-learners – topics include learning from studio tutorials and slide presentations by professional artists – individual advice is given on portfolio preparation and the processes involved in making overseas art school applications – the weekend includes study visits to galleries and museums in Newcastle, Edinburgh and York

Week two: independent study in the art school environment

Three days of self-directed studio work at Northumbria University with tutorial support from specialist printmaking, painting and drawing tutors followed by two days exploring art school feedback procedures using Gallery North, the University's experimental exhibition facility – participants are helped to learn from critical discussion and advice is given on the role of University libraries, archives and on-line resources in developing a personal approach to creative learning – *Art School: Language and Culture* concludes with an art language test in which each participant can assess their ability to cope with lectures, group critiques and seminars in an English-speaking art school.



Drawing at Featherstone Castle

Sian Bowen

Sian is an Associate Senior Lecturer in the Visual Arts Division specializing in drawing, painting and printmaking. She has a long association with Japan.

1985 Awarded a two-year Monbusho (Japanese Government Scholarship) to Japan.

1985-6 Studied intensive full-time course in Japanese, Osaka University for Foreign Studies.

1986-9 Studied “mosha” or traditional methods and materials for copying ancient Japanese, Korean and Chinese paintings, at Kyoto City University of Arts and maintained a studio on the outskirts of Kyoto. Exhibited in Kyoto, Osaka and Tokyo.

1991 Art Council Grant to study Japanese handmade papermaking at Kochi Prefectural Paper Institute. Touring solo exhibition of works made in Japan as part of the first Japan Festival UK.

1991-97 Established and taught Japanese language course for workers of Nissan, Sunderland.

2005-7 Researched the Harry S. Parkes Collection of Japanese Paper at the V&A, 150 year-old collection of papers formerly produced for all manner of uses in society (from medicine bags to poetry writing).

2006 Invited by writer Madoka Moriguchi to carry out a three-month residency at Kyoto Art Centre, a former school in centre of the city. Installation of large-scale works in the North Gallery. Further exhibition staged at A1 Space, Nagoya. Grant from Daiwa Foundation to visit craft-workers in Japan using “vanishing” papermaking techniques, i.e. techniques which were common in the past but rarely employed nowadays. New works made using these papers formed V&A exhibition, “Gaze”, in the following year.

2008 Researched traditional processes of Japanese lacquer. Visited master craftsmen in Japan (including National Living Treasure using lacquer and mother-of-pearl). Worked in the lacquer Conservation Studios of the V&A to produce a series of works on paper. These employed the traditional technique of “maki-e”, or dusting wet lacquer with powdered gold or silver.

2008 *Of Dust*, an exhibition of works in Japanese lacquer, gold and silver dust on paper, staged by the Anglo-Japanese Daiwa Foundation, London.



Installation at the Kyoto Art Centre

John Lavell

John is currently an AHRC funded doctoral student in the Visual Arts Division having graduated from our MA Art Practice Course in 2004. He lived in Japan from 1997 to 2003.

1997-1999 Senior Instructor, Geos Language Systems, Wakayama, Japan
1999-2001 Assistant Language Teacher, Hirakata Board Of Education, Hirakata, Japan
2001-2003 Cultural Studies Teacher, Soai School, Osaka, Japan
2002-2003 Art Teacher, Osaka International School, Mino, Japan

Exhibitions (*solo shows)

1998 *East Meets West* Wakayama Civic Gallery, Japan
1999 *Drawings and Prints** Wakayama Civic Gallery, Japan
2000 *Washi** Papa Jons Gallery, Kyoto, Japan
2001 *Chawan** Papa Jons Gallery, Kyoto, Japan
2002 *Summer Exhibition* Osaka International School, Japan
2003 *Mushin** Art Box Gallery, Osaka, Japan

“The sharp sound of an arrow penetrating paper will awaken us from the dream of life.”

So began my first lesson in Kyudo (Japanese archery).

Its practice peels away the layers of ego to reveal our true nature where the intellectual mind is quieted and intuition takes over, “Kyudo is not something you learn, it melts into your bones.” Its goal is to attain *Mushin*- no mind. There is only this moment, “One shot, one life.”

Yugamae (readying the bow) “stand as natural as a tree”

Torikake (setting the glove) “Like holding a bird.”

Tenouchi (grip control) “Imagine an egg in your palm and a glass of water balanced on top.”

Monomi (viewing the target) “You are not aiming, you are sending your spirit to the target.”

Hanare (the release) “when snow falls from a branch under its own weight.”

“The arrow should be thought of as existing in the target before you release it. “Apparently my three-foot-wide shot is a lack of spiritual imagination. “Sometimes we will hit the target but miss the self. At other times we will miss the target but hit the self. Our purpose, though, is to hit the target as the self and hope that...” Sensei brings me back full circle to the beginning of the lesson.

I spend the rest of the lesson trying to pierce the paper target, the sharp *thwocking* of enlightenment a repetitive and meditative counterpoint to my continued misses.

John Lavell, 2008

Ikuko Tsuchiya

Ikuko was the Jo Spence Fellow at Northumbria University from 2001 to 2003, undertaking a collaborative project 'Images of Trust' with the Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust. Throughout this project, she worked as a photographer documenting the various aspects of care in the context of the healthcare organization, and she produced many Black & White photographs. This two-year project culminated in the publication of a book 'Images of Trust' and a series of exhibitions in England and Japan between 2004 and 2005. Photographs from this project won her the Miki Jun Award from Tokyo Nikon Salon.

Both the Jo Spence Fellowship and the Images of Trust project gave Ikuko a valuable opportunity to work with people in a healthcare organization. She is currently undertaking an MPhil at the School of Arts and Social Sciences, and is a member of the Japanese Photo-Therapist Association.



Exhibition in Tokyo Nikon Salon, Japan

Hiroko Oshima

The topic of Hiroko's PhD is the opposition between the concept of individuality (that aspect of fine art practice which concerns personal creativity and authorial intention) and the notion of *groupness* (a term developed in Hiroko's thesis to express the sense of belonging experienced by creative practitioners who work in artists' groups). Hiroko speculates that, in any individual visual art practice, there will be a prioritising and shifting between the two. She explores the different view taken on this interaction in eastern and Western cultures. As a result, her research combines studio practice and reflective writing to establish a better understanding, or an alternative view on, the Western enthusiasm for individualistic creativity.

Hiroko is a member of the Ryu Art Group and a graduate of Tama Art University in Tokyo and the MA Art Practice Course, Northumbria University.

Sachiyo Goda

Sachiyo is a doctoral research student in the Visual Arts Division working on the relationship between the ancient Japanese space-time idea of *ma* and a set of similar concepts in Western art and philosophy. The term *ma* has many aspects in Japan, not only in its cultural and philosophical context, but also in everyday speech. It can refer to a meaningful gap in a conversation or an interesting set of spatial intervals inside a beautiful building and, as a result, disciplines as diverse as architecture, the martial arts, performing arts, and psychoanalysis have specialized versions of the word.

The aim of her PhD is to establish and examine new applications of 'conversational Ma' within the different levels of dialogue that occur between an artist and her work at the point of studio production and, when this 'creative conversation' has been concluded, between a gallery audience and a completed artwork.

Sachiyo is a member of the Ryu Art Group, a graduate of Musashino Art University in Tokyo and the MA Art Practice Course, Northumbria University.